

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

# Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE

139

ADVENTURE BUCKET LIST  
VOLCANIC VANUATU  
WOLLEMI HIGHS AND LOWS  
ARKAROO LA TRACK NOTES  
FOLIO: GREAT AUSTRALIAN CLIMBS  
CROSSING THE COCKBURNS  
THE SECRET LIFE OF EELS  
GUIDE TO CHASING RAINBOWS

## Conquering the volcano

Profile: Deborah Tabart  
Last of the Great Apes  
Party food in the bush  
Gear for the new year  
Sydney funnel-web  
26 peaks in 2 days

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## Wild

AUSTRALIAN WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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### WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



**Cover** Making the final ascent of Mt Marum on Ambrym, Vanuatu. Ed Hill (image reflected)

**Contents** A lightning strike at sunset over the Tanami Desert, WA. Michael Seebeck; michaelseebeck.com



## New year, new look, new must-do list

I consider myself an upbeat kind of a person, but I confess I'm not in the best mood as I type. I have just learned that the federal government has started on the road to "one-stop shops" for environmental approvals, striking a deal at a Council of Australian Governments meeting to devolve powers to the states and territories. Perhaps I cannot complain that this could unravel 30 years' worth of safeguards for wild places as cash-strapped governments rush to approve port and mine developments. I did, after all, partly up sticks to Australia to take advantage of the solid economy, and the Coalition claims the move will boost prosperity by cutting unnecessary delays and paperwork for investors. But phrases like "Great Barrier Reef dotted with oil rigs", and the Wentworth Group's statistic that the cost of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act to business has only been 0.1 per cent of investment in nine years, make me uneasy. Plus they've gone and said there's no more funding for the Environmental Defenders Office, which, as The Wilderness Society's Glen Klatovsky puts it, effectively leaves David without a sling in the David-and-Goliath battle to protect pristine areas. While I agree with the readers who believe politics should stay well away from Wild's adventure stories, some headlines won't go ignored. I only hope that by showing off as many of this country's unique and hypnotising landscapes as possible, Wild can convince a few more people that—whatever the environmental approval process—we can benefit just as much from the experience of these places than from their monetisation.

Another reason for my dark mood is that I've just farewelled a good friend on her way to Everest base camp, making that the third Himalaya trip I've bailed on for unexciting reasons. As bucket list items go, that one's pretty high, and probably one that many of you have ticked off. Like most

people, my pen starts twitching towards the end of December with a list of all I want to achieve the following year. For 2014 I have resolved, for example, to spend an extended amount of time in southern Tasmania, to see what splitboarding's all about, and to become a much better wildlife photographer. On p52-55 you'll find a template bucket list of homegrown adventures and attractions that I hope will get the juices flowing even if you disagree with the selection. I would, of course, love to know which spots, activities and new skills you have on your to-do list this year.

The eagle-eyed among you will notice that our talented designer Blake Storey has been busy tweaking certain elements of Wild's pages and that this extends to the renaming of a few sections. By making these small changes we aim to better encapsulate the diversity of outdoor events, clubs, gadgets, wilderness issues and experiences that we cover. The first issue of 2014 also brings an updated masthead that we hope will shout louder from the newsstand to first-time readers.

As for what to expect from the rest of the magazine, think lava lakes and bat caves, prehistoric canyons and passionate campaigners, epic treks and dramatic crags, with a few rare rainbows thrown in.

And now to the third reason for my less than jubilant mood: we are losing the energetic, erudite and regularly side-splitting musings of Dr Steve Van Dyck. We shall bravely forge on as our much-loved Nature of the Beast columnist takes his retirement, and I wish him and you a remarkable year ahead.

Carrie Trotter  
Editor

*Carrie*

# Wild

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Issue 138, Nov-Dec 2013



## LETTER OF THE ISSUE

**Geoff wins a Platypus Sprinter XT 35 hydration backpack valued at \$225. This top-loading weatherproof pack is designed for long day hikes with a three-litre reservoir, waistbelt**

**pockets, padded suspension and removable frame sheet with aluminum stay.**

## I HAVE A DREAM

I would like to share a dream in which a group of bushwalkers gather at Melbourne's Southbank to begin an eight-week trek through the Alps to Canberra. The reason is I am currently investigating a route linking Melbourne with the Australian Alps Walking Track that I spent years developing in the 1970s and '80s. On a recent trip with my son, daughter and granddaughter I began by walking along the Main Yarra Trail, which is also the Capital City Trail until Dights Falls, and followed the Diamond Creek Trail from Eltham. East of Diamond Creek, this trail is being extended to Hurstbridge by the Creek Trailblazers volunteer group, from where we made for Mount Sugarloaf in Kinglake National Park via the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Upon reaching the summit you can connect with park tracks near Running Creek Reservoir. There is a long way to go to find the best way of linking up with the AAWT but Yarra Ranges National Park and the thrills of the alpine national landscape beckon. I write to see if other *Wild* readers wish to get involved in turning dream into reality?

**Geoff Mosley  
Hurstbridge, VIC**

## MORE POLITICS PLEASE

It was with great concern that I read Jeremy Sternson's letter in *Wild* 138. I have found this magazine to be one of the least political around, despite the many major attacks on the environment of late. The head-in-the-sand,

"peace in our time" approach has led to us facing attacks on the environment from all fronts. The proposal—thankfully rejected—from a New South Wales political party for a tenure swap between national parks and state forests so parks can be logged to meet unsustainable timber contract demands is one recent example. The NSW government is also considering using native forest woodchips for power generation. Meanwhile, the federal government is pushing to revoke world heritage listing for areas of Tasmania in order for them to be logged and mined with no real regard for the long-term environmental and tourism values of the land. If achieved, this could set a precedent for world heritage areas across Australia. Retrospective components in the federal bill relating to the protection of the Tarkine could also remove our right to challenge environmental approvals before the courts. If anything, now is the time for *Wild* to be more political.

**Tim J Bidder  
Narrabeen, NSW**

## AN UNFORTUNATE INTRUSION

I wish that politics did not have to intrude into people's adventures and wilderness areas, but the sad situation is that political decisions directly influence their survival. Without environmental campaigns, many wilderness areas would have been consumed by mining, forestry and other inappropriate developments. It is an ongoing battle and I for one am glad that *Wild* has the courage to speak out against activities that adversely affect our environment.

**Leigh Ackland  
Deepline, VIC**

## SAD EXCUSE FOR SHELTER

It was interesting that 'Happy huts' (p52-5, *Wild* issue 138) ranked New Pelion Hut among the top three in Australia. I recently walked in the Frenchmans Cap area, which involved staying at the very pleasant and appreciated Lake Vera Hut. Conversation among the group that night was inevitably drawn to huts and the general consensus was that New Pelion, like its Windy Ridge brother, was excessively costly to build, poorly designed, mouldy and unappealing. Even during an unseasonal cold spell two summers ago we chose to stay in tents nearby rather than use this hut. There are many more worthy recipients of this lofty ranking in Tasmania alone.

**Jon How  
Hobart, TAS**

**Reader's letters and tips** are welcome (with sender's full name and address) and could win you a fabulous piece of outdoor kit! Write to *Wild*, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, VIC 3025 or email [wild@primecreative.com.au](mailto:wild@primecreative.com.au)

## FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

**f Paul Byard:** I once took a tin of pudding that you boil into Frenchmans Cap for my birthday. I carried it for two long days and when I pulled it out of my pack and put it in the pot I quickly realised there wasn't any room left for the water #overpacking

**f Mark Carter:** I once carried a winter wetsuit up a Welsh mountain to snorkel in a lake near the top to see a rare fish, but I forgot to pack the snorkel and mask... #overpacking

**f Heremiai Titoko:** Met two young guys on the South Coast Track who begged us to take some family-sized blocks of chocolate, they had packed about 20 and were struggling to carry their packs any further #overpacking

**@Al\_Humphreys:** Ignore adventurers banging on about how tough expeditions are. Nothing is worse than a day in front of a bloody annoying computer.

**@TasmaniaParks:** Devils pinching boots? That's an unexpected side effect of Maria Island's new Tassie devil population!

## BUSHWALKING TIP



The heavy-duty aluminium foil used for stove windshields will last for decades if you carry it rolled on to your fuel tank and set it up with a paperclip at the diameter to suit your chosen billy.

**Dan Ewald  
Lennox Head, NSW**



**Dan wins a Tokul XC3 hydration backpack valued at \$110. This low-profile pack features a two-litre reservoir, a litre of gear storage, ventilated shoulder straps and reflective detailing.**



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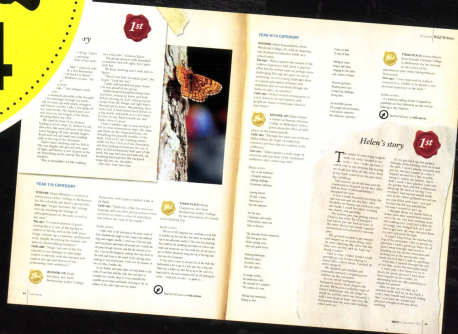
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# ENTER Wild Writers 2014



The inaugural *Wild Writers* competition, run in association with Outdoor Education Australia and Sea to Summit, attracted more than 150 entries from students across Australia between Grade 5 and Year 12. In addition to prizes for the three finalists in each of the four age categories, the winning stories were published in the July/August '13 issue of the magazine and on [wild.com.au](http://wild.com.au). For 2014, we are again seeking to encourage young people to develop their writing skills while appreciating the outdoors.

Entries for this year's *Wild Writers* competition will open on February 1 and close on May 1, 2014.

This year's topic is ***Life in the bush***

There are four age groups: Grades 5/6, Years 7/8, Years 9/10, Years 11/12

Entries must be in English, 500-750 words and in written form (eg. essay, non-fictional narrative, diary entries, poem). They must be the student's own work, original and unpublished. Writers are encouraged to write about their experiences and feelings, the flora and fauna they come across and the lessons they learn out in the bush. Images are not required for entry but may be requested from finalists. Educators are encouraged to submit entries on behalf of their class or school, though entrants may also submit material independently. Students may enter as many times as they wish.

**To enter by email:** Entries must be emailed to [wild@primecreative.com.au](mailto:wild@primecreative.com.au) in .doc, .docx or .rtf form together with a signed and scanned permission form (available at [wild.com.au/schools](http://wild.com.au/schools)). Multiple entries may be sent in one email.

**To enter by post:** Send hard copies (these will not be returned) with a signed permission form to: Wild Writers  
11-15 Buckhurst St  
South Melbourne, VIC 3205

## [wild.com.au/schools](http://wild.com.au/schools)



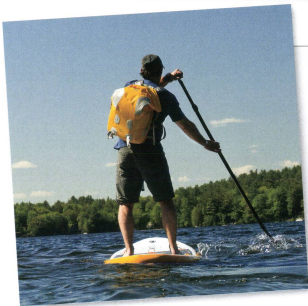


Reader Alex Gott-Cumbers took this coming down Eskdale Spur from the summit of Mount Bogong over Melbourne Cup weekend

## Photograph checklist: Atmospheric optics

- Rainbows occur when sunlight passes through water vapour, displaying a full colour range, so always photograph with the sun behind you. This will allow maximum vibrancy of all the colours.
- Compose your shot so you capture both the bow and the 'pot of gold' end of the rainbow, adding some terrain will add depth and perspective to your image.
- Use a circular polarising filter if you have one as this will assist with getting the colours to really jump out with richness and saturation.
- Use a lens hood and keep a dry cloth handy. Rainbows equal rain, so chances are you will get stray drops hitting your lens and minimising these will save time later if you post produce your images.

Award-winning landscape photographer Cameron Blake runs weekend workshops and 6-day photographic tours on the Overland Track. [overlandphototours.com.au](http://overlandphototours.com.au)



Alex wins a Lowepro Dryzone 40L roll-top backpack valued at \$269. The durable pack with breathable EVA backpad boasts an IPX-6 splashproof rating, removable padded camera case and lash points for attaching your trekking poles or tripod.

For your chance to win a quality piece of outdoor kit, send your humorous, inspiring or spectacular shots to [wild@primecreative.com.au](mailto:wild@primecreative.com.au).

To be considered for the Mar/Apr Wild Shot, submit your best photo by Feb 1.

**FLICK TO P56**  
for more on photographing rainbows

# Outback challenge to recreate ill-fated trek



The inaugural Big Burke and Wills Trek across the Strezlecki and Sturt Stony deserts is expected to attract around 300 bushwalkers, history buffs and adventure racers this August. The 11-day trek in aid of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation will replicate a 330-kilometre portion of the original 3,750-kilometre route across Australia taken by ill-fated expedition leaders Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills in 1860. Teams of four will set off from the famous Dig Tree on Cooper Creek in south-west

Queensland and average around 30 kilometres a day across north-eastern South Australia before finishing at the Birdsville Hotel.

The trekking party will be accompanied by six camels and one horse, as the remaining men in Burke and Wills' group were, and male entrants are encouraged to sport 19th-century-style facial hair.

Greg Donovan, founder of the Born to Run Foundation, which also organises the Big Red Run in the Simpson Desert, said: "The trek will be challenging because aside from the

odd cattle station track we'll be far from signs of civilisation, experiencing the landscape as Burke and Wills did—whether they enjoyed it or not." He added: "It won't be for the fainthearted but not beyond most people's capability, and it's not a trek that you can easily do independently because of the permits needed for crossing national parks and traditional lands."

Whereas Burke and Wills' expedition to map Australia's interior from south to north left only one survivor, walkers will this time be treated to three meals a day, accommodation in eight-person tents and a full medical team. Entry for the full trek—there is also a five-day option—costs \$3,775, in line with what most Australians pay to attempt the Kokoda Trail. Donovan said one of the most challenging days will be the first one, when trekkers have to cover 40 kilometres of rocky terrain to camp at Burke's grave, though some may find the two-day Sturt Stony Desert section the most difficult.



[burkeandwillstrek.com.au](http://burkeandwillstrek.com.au)

# Canberran conquers highest 26 in two days

Canberra-based bushwalker Kyle Williams has become the first person on record to hike Australia's 26 highest mainland peaks non-stop.

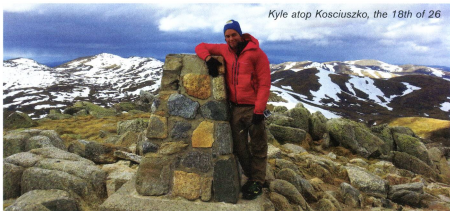
In November, the 37-year-old reached the top of all 26 peaks over 2,000 metres in the Snowy Mountains in the space of 48 hours without stopping to sleep.

Setting out from the Round Mountain trailhead for the northernmost peak of Mount Jagungal, Williams covered 130 kilometres and gained around 5,850 metres before finishing at Back Perisher Mountain. It was his third attempt at the feat, having turned back due to bad weather and injury earlier in the year.

The former army medic said: "It was by far the hardest thing I've ever done physically or mentally. Although I carried a locator beacon, I really felt the threat of my isolation in the off-track sections and the conditions varied from a sunny 17C as I set out down to -6C as I climbed Perisher at 1am."

He first hatched the plan after climbing the Aussie 10 in 2008, and commenced researching it in earnest while recovering from a broken leg in 2012.

"Knowing it's 45 kilometres to the second checkpoint or that you've gone 70 kilometres and only ticked off five peaks begins to mess with your mind, but as airy as it sounds, you find something deep inside yourself that keeps you putting one foot in front of the other," he said.



Kyle atop Kosciuszko, the 18th of 26

Aside from a few blisters, lost toenails and nausea caused by sleep deprivation, Williams said four months of strength training and numerous reconnaissance walks stood him in good stead for the journey.

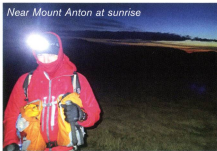
He added: "I've guided walks in Tasmania, the Kimberley and Kokoda but the Snowy Mountains has to be one of the most

challenging areas because of the sheer unpredictability of the conditions, potentially including snow cover that just sucks the energy from your legs."

His pack totalled 15 kilograms including base layers, waterproof jacket, water and first aid kit, and friends met him at various points along the route with snack rations. He is now writing a guidebook to the route.

"I'm sure someone will smash my time soon but for me it's as much about the experiences leading up to the adventure as the goal itself," said Williams.

In 2012, Sydney bushwalker Geoff Mallinson bagged the 26 peaks in a single trip from south to north, walking for 36 hours over the course of three days. He too had attempted the challenge twice before, with the aim of completing it in 24 hours.



Near Mount Anton at sunrise



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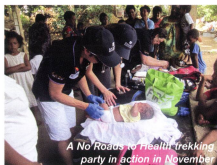
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# Kokoda medical treks proving popular

Australian medical professionals are donning their walking boots in droves to join a health initiative in Papua New Guinea fronted by Melbourne-based No Roads Expeditions. With five departures scheduled for 2014, there are more than 80 medics on the waiting list to combine eight days of hiking on the Kokoda Trail with assisting in remote clinics. The No Roads to Health voluntourism program was established last year in partnership with the AusAid Foundation to address the medical needs of people living in the four main villages along the iconic wartime track, and women in particular. Peter Miller, No Roads Expeditions founder, said: "We've been leading walks on Kokoda for 10 years but our aid work was rather hotchpotch until now; we've essentially stepped in to fill the gaps that AusAid can't cover and hope in time to extend the initiative to other parts of PNG."



By educating local male health workers in maternal medicine the initiative has already saved lives, including one woman who had to be flown to hospital with a breached birth that would have otherwise gone undetected. Each year Miller and his fellow guides lead 40 people on Kokoda through-hikes, but the medical treks stick to the middle of the trail to maximise time spent with the communities

of Efogi, Kagi, Naduri and Menari.

According to Miller, forward bookings for Papua New Guinea have not been affected by last September's Black Cat Track massacre and the tourism authority is working hard to allay fears among Australian trekkers. He said: "People who live along Kokoda, which gets about 4,000 trekkers a year, rely on tourists and are not out to make a quick buck like those opportunist robbers on the Black Cat Track, which gets about 100 trekkers a year."

No Roads Expeditions runs a fitness program of weekend walks around Melbourne for those preparing to attempt the Kokoda Trail, recommending eight weeks of training for someone with good general fitness.

Other popular tours in the company's offering include trekking the Lemosho Shira Track on Mount Kilimanjaro and sea kayaking in Indonesia's Komodo National Park.

# Couple to trek Canning Stock Route

Two novice bushwalkers from Geraldton are planning to become the first to walk the Canning Stock Route unaided, while raising awareness of suicide prevention services. The gruelling 1,850-kilometre trip from Halls Creek in the Kimberley to Wiluna in mid-west WA is expected to take Rose and Mick Weber eight weeks starting in July. They will be filmed from a support vehicle but otherwise independent, each carrying and towing up to 80 kilograms. Last April, the couple cycled 5,000 kilometres across WA to talk to remote communities about dealing with mental health issues, but this will be their first long trek.

Rose, whose brother committed suicide two years ago, said: "We hope that by walking the longest historic stock route in the world we can send a message that no matter how hard things get in your life, you have to keep going. 'I'm dreading the first section but it's better that we get many of the route's 961 sand dunes out of the way at the beginning by walking north to south.'"

She added: "The walk is a healing process for me and I feel I can have a bigger impact on breaking the taboo around mental health issues doing this than in my 17 years working as a nurse."

The route across the Great Sandy, Little Sandy and Gibson deserts was first plotted with wells in 1910 but largely abandoned for cattle driving in 1959.

Less than a dozen people have walked the popular 4WD route, with South African Gaynor Shoeman becoming the first solo walker to make it from Billiluna to Wiluna without support except for pre-positioned food drops last year.

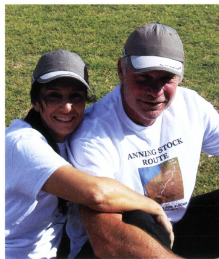
An number of Australian brands have signed on to support the couple's journey. They will be wearing Gondwana lightweight clothing, using HTI Water forward osmosis filters and cooking with a Kelly Kettle in the desert. The couple is getting fit for the challenge with long bushwalks and weight training, but admit they are little prepared for the sandstorms and punishing temperatures they may face.

Rose said: "We've taken advice from Gaynor and Track Care WA, and I have no doubt we'll be successful."

A death by suicide occurs every 40 seconds in Australia, the majority among men aged 35-50.



[suicideawareness.simplesite.com](http://suicideawareness.simplesite.com)



Windy Corner on the Canning Stock Route





## INTRODUCING THE BOREAS™ PACK RANGE.

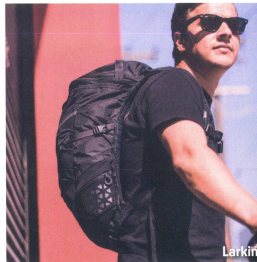
Pick your pack. Choose your adventure.



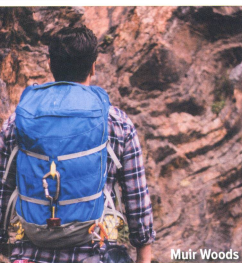
Lost Coast



Buttermilk



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## Adam Clay

Climbing Club of South Australia president



### How has the club developed since the early days?

The CCSA was set up in 1968 by a group of climbers from the Adelaide University Mountain Club and quickly took an active role in negotiating access with landowners and government bodies. I've been involved with the club for a decade and have seen it change in the last couple of years from a group of 20 that would meet every two months to an organisation of more than 100 climbers of all ages and abilities, who are active on social media and highly engaged with the local community. We spent \$3,000 on crag upkeep in 2013, including tree-planting and clean-up days, and we've started sponsoring introductory days and competitions. I think South Australian climbing is in a really good place.

### Who makes up your membership?

Our most junior member is eight-years-old and our most senior is in his late 70s, and the split is about 60/40 men and women. Newcomers can send out a club email to find others to climb with and there's always someone hanging around Norton Summit at the weekend who'll happily put up a rope for you. As well as experienced rock

climbers such as Tony Barker and Luke Adams we have an increasing number of members who are new to the sport, including parents who get into it after watching their kids.

### Is access to the Norton Summit cliff still at risk?

The CCSA has worked hard to build a good relationship with stakeholders regarding access to Norton Summit, which is on land owned by a mining company and a nesting site for peregrines. But I take the calls when overzealous climbers ignore the conditions placed on the area.

### What are your priorities for 2014?

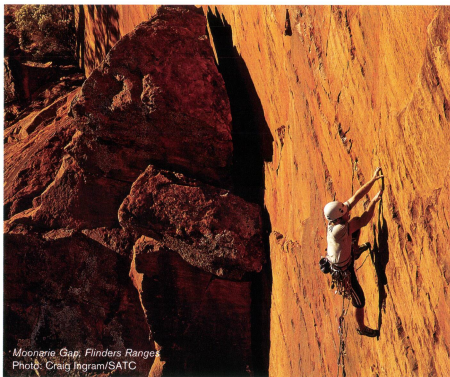
We're hoping to become affiliated with Sport Climbing Australia and university clubs across the state; we want to run a competition series with a view to sending an SA state team to the Australia Boulder Nationals. South Australia has been fairly isolated in climbing terms but people like Trent Searcey are going great guns and we're seeing new people through the doors of Vertical Life Climbing Gym and Adelaide Bouldering Club.

### Where do you most enjoy climbing?

I frequent Morialta and multi-pitch routes at Moonarie, but also love deep water soloing at Second Valley on a hot day.



[climbingclubsouthaustralia.asn.au](http://climbingclubsouthaustralia.asn.au)



Moonarie Gap, Flinders Ranges  
Photo: Craig Ingram/SATC



## Queensland river race hotting up



Now in its fourth year, the Barron Valley Challenge on May 10–11 is expected to draw its biggest crowd of paddlers yet following the addition of a Canadian canoe relay event. The annual downriver race, which is hosted by the Tinaroo Canoe Club, features 12- and 50-kilometre courses between Mareeba and Kuranda in the Cairns hinterland. Taking place the weekend after the Gregory River Canoe Marathon, the race attracted around 90 competitors last year, including several from southern states.

Race director Terry McClelland said:

"The BRC is unique in that the first 30 kilometres are grade one and two, then there are about 10 rapids over the last 20 kilometres including a grade three you can portage."

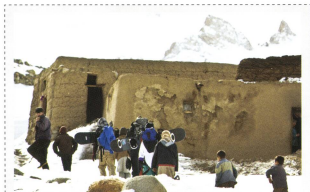
"So far we've seen Kevlar boats taking the win because they're so fast, but you have to use the same craft the whole way through and plastic boats are actually better suited for the last part of the course."

Previous years have attracted kayakers and canoeists ranging from age 12 to 68 and organisers are optimistic about elite paddlers, such as two-time winner Matt Blundell from Sydney, getting the word out.

McClelland added: "The Barron River is an exciting one because it flows quite well and you're continually negotiating bends and trees. We hope that incorporating a relay race for teams of between four and eight people will attract more southerners up to paddle in the warm water."



[qld.canoe.org.au](http://qld.canoe.org.au)



**Adventurethon Kalbarri, WA, Jan 25**

The most hardcore of the five courses in this endurance festival includes an 18-kilometre ocean paddle, 35-kilometre bike ride and 16-kilometre trail run. [adventurethon.com.au](http://adventurethon.com.au)

**Cradle Mountain Run, TAS, Feb 1**

This popular 82-kilometre trail run sees around 60 nimble-footed competitors traverse the Overland Track in a day. [cradletrailrun.asn.au](http://cradletrailrun.asn.au)

**Into the Wild exhibition, TAS, until Feb 16**

The QVMAG Art Gallery collects some of Tasmania's most powerful wilderness photography, including the work of Truchanas, Thwaites and Smithies, in this free exhibition. [qvmag.tas.gov.au](http://qvmag.tas.gov.au)

**Adventure Travel Film Festival, VIC, Feb 14–16**

This year's line-up features everything from snowboarders shredding Afghanistan's backcountry (pictured) to an amateur sailor making his way from the UK to Australia. [adventuretravelfilmfestival.com](http://adventuretravelfilmfestival.com)

**Falls Creek Mountain Raid, VIC, Feb 15–16**

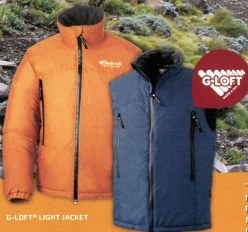
This two-day navigational race for teams of four incorporates trail running, mountain biking and paddling. [rapidascent.com.au](http://rapidascent.com.au)

**Snowy Mountains Half Marathon, NSW, Feb 23**

Trail run courses of five, 10 and 21 kilometres make up part of the Dirt Fest weekend of multisport races in the Thredbo Valley. [tre-x.com.au](http://tre-x.com.au)

Wild Diary

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# National trail attracting all sorts

Volunteers in charge of maintaining the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT), which runs from one end of eastern Australia to the other, have reported a surge in enquiries from walkers in the last 12 months.

BNT chairman Nick Jacomas said word has been spreading about the multi-use trail, which was opened by the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association in 1972, since trailrunner Richard Bowles completed it in five months in 2012. Jacomas said: "We're getting more walkers and mountain bikers than we are horse riders on the route at the moment, which I think is largely to do with people telling other walkers about it on Facebook."

The 5,330-kilometre trail follows old stock routes, wagon tracks, brumby paths and fire trails the length of the Great Dividing Range between Healesville and Cooktown, making it the world's longest multi-use trekking route. The wide path and avoidance of wilderness areas has been seen as a barrier to bushwalkers in the past, but efforts are being made to entice them.

Jacomas added: "We're in the middle of remapping the Queensland section because we realise that even the government maps are diabolical and today's walkers want more detailed information than a traditional guidebook."

Gympie man Ben Dyer became the second person to through-hike the route last May, completing it in only three and a half months.

He said: "The BNT is different from a lot of other trails in that it is not really a foot-wide path, as hikers are used to. It is not like a weekend hike, it is a way of life."

He added: "There is plenty of beautiful scenery but that's only a fraction of the experience...my highlights were the simplicity of life, the people I met and the animals I shared the trail with."

Dyer—who has also hiked the Pacific Crest Trail—believes lack of awareness is the biggest obstacle that Australia's national trail must overcome to attract more walkers, and suggests nature lovers reevaluate what they want from a long-distance trail.

Keen bushwalker and equestrian Belinda Ritchie completed an unsupported 347-day trail ride from south to north in November.

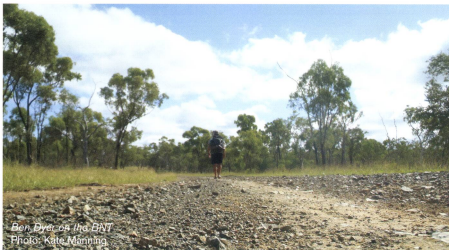
She said: "There are a lot of side trails through state forests and national parks that are a real privilege to ride on."

"I went up to a week without seeing anyone else but the walkers I did meet were often quite emotional to see me with the horses and feel a connection to Australia's unique pioneer and droving history."

On average, three people complete the Bicentennial National Trail in one go each year.



bicentennialnationaltrail.com.au



Ben Dyer on the BNT  
Photo: Kate Manning

# Aussie soldiers in pole position



Above: (L-R) Heath Jamieson, Canadian soldier Chris Downey, Brit actor Dominic West, Canadian soldier Alex Beaudin D'Anjou, Walking with the Wounded co-founder Simon Daglish, Aussie explorer Eric Philips and Seamus Donaghue are Team Soldier On

Corporal Seamus Donaghue of Brisbane and private Heath Jamieson of Sydney were among the group of 12 wounded servicemen to reach the geographic south pole with Prince Harry on December 13 as part of a charity expedition. The South Pole Allied Challenge had been intended as a race between teams from the UK, US and Commonwealth but difficult terrain forced organisers to shorten the route. Donaghue and Jamieson, who both sustained gunshot wounds in Afghanistan, trekked 200 miles with 70-kilogram pulks in temperatures as low as -40C on behalf of Canberra-based charity Soldier On. [soldieron.org.au](http://soldieron.org.au)

Prince Harry and Heath Jamieson at the south pole



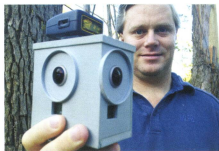
# Emu cam making tracks more accessible

The producers of a multimedia guide to the Six Foot Track released late last year have created a backpack-mounted camera system that captures geo-located panoramic images every five metres that can then be added to interactive maps of walking trails.

Sydney-based developer Matt McClelland, founder of the New South Wales database Wildwalks.com, plans to make the specifications and software for the home-built device available for free to other bushwalkers in the hope they will help build up resources for inexperienced or nervous hikers.

He said: "I started building the camera about three years ago—it's essentially four GoPros stuck together, synced and reprogrammed to provide GPS data—because I was frustrated by the inconsistency of hiking trail websites, which often just give you one paragraph of information and a map created from raw, erroneous GPS data."

At 3.5 kilograms plus batteries and roughly the size of an emu's head, the Emuview camera is far lighter than Google's 25-kilogram Trekker device designed for Streetview-style backcountry mapping. McClelland, together with bloggers Caro Ryan and Geoff Mallinson, is working to establish best practice for presenting track notes online.



"One of the things that frustrates me about touristic trail websites is they rarely equip families and first-timers to walk it, so then they have a miserable time," he said.

"We decided to experiment on the Six Foot Track because, though it's not particularly wild, it's probably the most popular overnight walk in New South Wales," he added.

"I believe we've produced the most detailed interactive map for a hiking trail in the world." In addition to a guidebook and website about the century-old trail linking Katoomba and Jenolan Caves, the team created a series of short videos with tips for your first overnight walk. While bushwalking groups often cover the 45-kilometre track in a single day, it is traditionally walked in three days.

The team hopes the Emuview photos, which

pop up when you click icons on the online map, will reassure people worried about particular aspects of the walk.

McClelland said: "Most people won't bother [looking at images for each reference point] but they are there for people who are nervous about bridge crossings or walking in different types of forest, for example."

The accompanying videos answer common queries such as where to find water along the track, what to do in an emergency and how to deal with menstruation.

Caro Ryan said: "This project is about taking away barriers for people to get into wild places; those who say 'it's not a proper walk if you don't go off track' forget about the fears that new bushwalkers can have."

"A lot of teenagers do the Six Foot Track as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award, which is the time of their life when a miserable experience can put them off ever going bush again."

The Overland Track is next on the agenda. Ryan added: "We're definitely not in this for the money, and it's a lonely job walking with the Emuview, but we're having fun."

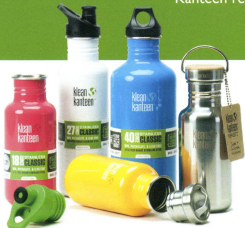


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# Icon walk opens in Alpine National Park

The upgraded track for Victoria's latest Icon Walk opened at the start of the summer, linking the alpine resorts of Falls Creek and Hotham in a three-day route over the Bogong High Plains.

The state and federal governments joint funded upgrades to the 37-kilometre track, camping platforms and toilet facilities at Cope Hut and Dubbins Hut as part of the Victoria

Bushfire Recovery Program.

The project is estimated to have cost around \$900,000 and is being with a series of free guided tours. A guidebook for the route includes information on the five new camping platforms as well as tips on the best lookouts and day walk options. Tourism North East has also released a booklet outlining 30 ideas for nature-based experiences in the High Country. Tented and inn-to-inn guided walks on the route are available through Evolve Adventures and Auswalk, while Milch Café in Falls Creek is also offering packed lunches aimed at bushwalkers.

The alpine crossing joins the Great Ocean Walk, Coastal Wilderness Walk and Grampians Peaks Trail under the Icon Walks branding umbrella.



Camping platform at Cope Hut  
Photo: Charlie Brown



Camping platforms can be booked at [parkstay.vic.gov.au](http://parkstay.vic.gov.au)

## New nationwide PLB hire service goes live

A new online safety initiative allows outdoor recreationalists across the country to hire personal locator beacons (PLBs) for as little as \$10 a day.

Neil Fahey, founder of Bushwalking Blog, launched the service in response to an increasing number of reports of people getting lost or injured in the bush without carrying a reliable communication device. He said: "I wanted to make PLBs more available to people who aren't hiking in those parts of New South Wales and Tasmania where

free ones are available, and to those who don't venture out into the wilderness often enough to warrant buying their own.

"Many in the bushwalking community think emergency beacons encourage complacency and are too regularly abused, but I believe being prepared for the worst should always be encouraged," he added.

He hopes that simplifying the booking process into a basic form and Paypal portal, compared to existing services that require phoning or answering multiple questions by

email, will encourage people new to bushwalking to enjoy the wilderness more safely.

Users are able to see availability of the RescueMe PLB1 units in real-time, with a lead-time of three days and return postage included in the hire fee.

The RescueMe PLB1, which retails for around \$400 and measures 77 x 51 x 33 millimetres, is considered the world's lightest at 125 grams.



[bushwalkingblog.com.au/plb-hire](http://bushwalkingblog.com.au/plb-hire)

## SCROGGIN

### Pampering added to Bay of Fires itinerary

A new spa has opened on the route of the four-day Bay of Fires Lodge Walk in northern Tasmania. Featuring an outdoor bathing area and library of wilderness literature, the spa will offer a range of therapies using native plants. Signature treatments include a Peat Mud Bath and Bush Magic Bath in honeysuckle and lemon tea tree oil. The privately-owned walking track, which features in the Great Walks of Australia portfolio, is open until May 1.

### Nepal to regulate adventure tours

Nepal's government has taken its first step to regulating adventure tourism by demanding all mountaineering operators register or face a financial penalty. The Ministry of Tourism claims the new provision is a response to a boom in operators entering the Himalayan nation without adequate risk management systems in place.

### New record set on Heysen

A 25-year old man from Adelaide walked the Heysen Trail end-to-end in 35 days in October, setting a new speed record in the process. While most people take around 60 days to walk the 1,200-kilometre trail, Jake Combe overcame heat stroke, severe blisters and hail to cover up to 50 kilometres a day. He also raised \$1,650 for Operation Flinders, enough to put one person through the wilderness adventure program designed to help rehabilitate young offenders.

### NZ tracker app gets Aussie roll-out

The free Get Home Safe app for Apple and Android, which tracks your location and sends an alert to friends if you fail to check in at your destination, has launched in Australia. The app is designed for everyday activities but also has a setting for users likely to drop in and out of service range in remote locations. Bushwalkers can opt to send an itinerary to their emergency contacts so that

an automated email or prepaid SMS will be sent containing last-known location and phone battery level if they fail to check in or extend their journey within 30 minutes of the expected arrival time. Phone reception is needed to cancel a panic notification however. Around 5,000 New Zealanders downloaded the app within the first four months of its release.

### Outdoor gear warehouses cleaning up

Kathmandu sales continued to rise by around four per cent in 2013, despite the downturn trend across the retail sector. The Christchurch-based company has 15 more stores in the pipeline after recent openings in Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. Research firm Ibisworld values the Australian outdoor equipment industry at \$816m and partly attributes its stagnation to the strong dollar making it attractive to buy from overseas websites and people swapping the outdoors for organised sports.



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### 2 MicroRocket \$99.95

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### 3 Thermarest NeoAir Dream \$389

The four-inch NeoAir Dream is designed for base camp luxury but packs more compactly than five-watt solar panel and lithium storage bank designed by Aussie expat Rob Bertucci. [bangbamtents.com](http://bangbamtents.com)

### 4 Solar-powered Tent \$449.59

If standing out from the foliage is your style, check out this four-person tent tent complete with five-watt solar panel and lithium storage bank designed by Aussie expat Rob Bertucci. [bangbamtents.com](http://bangbamtents.com)

### 5 NanoStriker \$39.95

This 14.5g, self-contained firestarter from Eotac features a replaceable Ferrocerium rod that creates sparks even when wet for up to 1,000 strikes and fits easily on a key chain. [seatosummitdistribution.com.au](http://seatosummitdistribution.com.au)

### 6 Tek Towel XL Wash Kit \$44.95

This handy travel kit features a 50x10cm towel and 30x30cm washcloth made of Tek's most absorbent fabric yet, plus a 40ml Wilderness Wash. [seatosummitdistribution.com.au](http://seatosummitdistribution.com.au)

### 7 Air-Volution Swag \$399

The biffins at Victoria-based Darche Outdoor Gear have busy overhauling swag set-ups so you can ditch your traditional poles for air poles designed to inflate in less than 10 seconds. [darche.com.au](http://darche.com.au)

### 8 Blackwolf Bugaboo 60+10 \$249.99

This serious trekking pack has been updated for the summer with tougher 100D ultra-ripstop nylon and the redesigned Ergo Plus harness for improved comfort. [blackwolf.com.au](http://blackwolf.com.au)

### 9 Firefly Pro Solas \$89

If the worst happens, this pocket-sized strobe light can alert rescuers up to 5.6km away with its powerful white 360-degree beam designed to last 56 hours on two AAs. [acrarter.com](http://acrarter.com)

### 10 Cheeki Cups \$19.95 for two

Cheeki's new 420ml cups made of premium grade stainless steel are ideal for appreciating cool beverages on your next car camping trip. [cheeki.net.au](http://cheeki.net.au)

### 11 Cadence Hydration Vest \$217.95

Geigerrig's latest pack is a lightweight, breathable vest with 1.5L pressurized bladder, allowing full range of arm movement and instant access to drinking water. [zenports.com.au](http://zenports.com.au)

### 12 Bog In A Bag \$36

No one wants to turn their tent into a toilet but camping with young kids could be made easier by this 1.2kg three-legged nylon stool with bag of liquid-absorbing crystals attached. [boginabag.com](http://boginabag.com)



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**13 The Jam H2O Sunglasses \$239.95**  
The bestseller in Dragon Alliance's new five-strong range of sunnies designed to float to the top if dropped in water features a tough, injected nylon frame and hydrophobic coating. [dragonalliance.com](http://dragonalliance.com)

**14 Teva Refugio \$129.95**  
These watersports shoes made of synthetic leather and mesh, with drainage channels in the forefoot and collapsible heel, are due to hit stores in February. [teva.com](http://teva.com)

**15 Led Lenser XR21R \$899**  
This 1.4kg military-spec torch is ideal for the deep dark wilderness with its 1,600-lumen beam stronger than most car headlights. [ledlenser.com.au](http://ledlenser.com.au)

**16 Marshall Mid \$230**  
Keen's new fast-hiking boot with open mesh is breathable and lightweight but also durable and cushioning thanks to a polyurethane midsole and high-traction rubber outsole. [keenfootwear.com.au](http://keenfootwear.com.au)

**17 Men's Cassini T-shirt \$25**  
Released at the start of summer, this crew-neck top with walking-themed screen print and side-split hem comes in green, grey or black super-soft combed cotton. [gondwanaoutdoor.com.au](http://gondwanaoutdoor.com.au)

**18 Men's Horizon 2 Cargo Shorts \$70**  
The North Face's lightest-weight cargo shorts, which are made of water-repellant ripstop nylon and feature Velcro pockets, have been updated for a more comfortable fit. [thenorthface.com.au](http://thenorthface.com.au)

**19 Kathmandu Med Active Towel \$29.98**  
This 40x60cm polyester/polyamide towel designed for mopping your sweaty brow comes in a zipped pouch and blue or red colour options. [kathmandu.com.au](http://kathmandu.com.au)

**20 Man Law BBQ Fish Basket \$20**  
This chrome-plated iron wire basket with 68.5cm handle will boost your efficiency when cooking your catch over an open fire. [manlaw-bbq.com.au](http://manlaw-bbq.com.au)

**21 Women's Tanzania Shirt \$64.95**  
This silver ion-treated, quick-drying, wrinkle-resistant polyester shirt with mesh venting offers UPF 30+ sun protection and antimicrobial freshness. [vigilante.com.au](http://vigilante.com.au)

**22 Nikon 1-Series AW1 \$1,091**  
Heralded as the first water- and shock-proof interchangeable lens camera, this rugged point-and-shoot released late last year features an outdoor-optimised display and high-definition video mode. [mynikonlife.com.au](http://mynikonlife.com.au)

**23 Grower's Cup \$4.50**  
For three cups of Fairtrade single-farm coffee in a jiffy, simply pour half a litre of hot water into this disposable, aroma-sealed French press, let it brew and pour back out. [growerscup.com](http://growerscup.com)

**24 ParaKito Wristband \$24.95**  
Available in a range of colours, this waterproof wristband contains a replaceable pellet of essential oils designed to dull the effects of mosquito bites for up to 15 days. [parakito.com](http://parakito.com)



# Sydney funnel-web spider *Atrax robustus*

At 8pm on February 15, 1927, at Thornleigh in Sydney, a two-year-old boy was bitten on the finger by a large black spider. By 9.30pm he was dead. His case confirmed for the first time the lethal potential of the male Sydney funnel-web spider.

This iconic Australian spider represents a group of arachnids, collectively known as funnel-web spiders, that fall within two genera (*Atrax* and *Hadronyche*), most of which seem not to be a threat to life. Indeed, the exact medical hazard posed by the Sydney species was only resolved after some 50 years of debate in the report of the 1927 case. Unfortunately, though antivenoms had been available for snake bites in various countries since 1894, no such antidote to this venom existed at the time.

This and other 'venomous' fatalities in the late 1920s prompted a collaborative effort to develop commercial Australian antivenoms. The work, which was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, brought together the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research and the then Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL) in Melbourne. By late 1930, Australia had its first commercial antivenom—against the mainland tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*). Unfortunately, the then-director of the Hall Institute, Dr Charles Kellaway, had failed to demonstrate the toxicity of Sydney funnel-web spider venom. Through the 50s, fellow University of Melbourne medical graduate Dr Saul Wiener—who successfully developed the redback spider antivenom in 1956—used more than 5,000 spiders in his studies of funnel-web venom and gave up, concluding that an antivenom was impossible.

One of the many challenges of working with this venom, unlike snake venoms, was that the key toxins that affect humans were not recognised as specific for the primate nervous system. Hence, it took 50 years, 12 more human deaths, thousands more spiders (mostly donated by the public through the Australian Reptile Park in Gosford), and countless experiments before this deadly problem was solved. It was ultimately through the persistence of Dr Struan Sutherland and his team at CSL, as well as collaborators at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital and elsewhere, that the mysteries of this distinctive Australian creature were cracked.

In December 1980, the first funnel-web antivenom was issued to hospitals in New South Wales for prospective trials. So dramatic was the effect of the antivenom that when it was administered at Royal North Shore Hospital in early 1981 the intensive care physician treating the patient said Sutherland "had ruined a bloody good syndrome". No deaths have been reported since.

Due to the rapidity and ferocity of the effects of its venom, which has caused death among both children and adults within two hours of the bite, the Sydney funnel-web spider has become known as the 'most venomous spider in the world'. This is because the key toxin binds to the primate neuronal sodium channel and interferes with the normal signaling of the nervous system. This effectively causes a storm of electrochemical signals that results in increased blood pressure and heart rate, twitching muscles, profuse sweating, salivation and, if severe enough, coma. Deaths can occur in this early phase or later in the so-called 'exhaustion' phase, when the body is depleted of neurotransmitters and the blood pressure drops precipitously.

The antivenom absorbs free unbound venom, thereby stopping toxin action. As the human body can easily tolerate rabbit antibodies, which make up the antivenom, it is a wholly safe and effective treatment. Depending on the dose of venom injected and the sex and species of spider involved, a patient may need none, one or multiple vials of antivenom. Curiously, unlike most spiders, it is the male Sydney funnel-web spider that is the most dangerous of that species.



Photo: Bill Corn / Department of Defence, Australia

Fortunately, not all funnel-web spiders are so deadly as the Sydney species. As a group, these medium- to large-sized black spiders (one to five centimetres), consisting of more than 40 species, are distributed widely across south-eastern Australia. They occur from the Adelaide Hills through the Dandenongs and eastern Victoria, up through the ACT, and along coastal New South Wales up into southern Queensland and even Fraser Island. Outlying populations also exist in Tasmania and north Queensland.

While they mostly prefer moist rainforest remnant habitats, some species live in the dry woodland areas west of the Great Dividing Range. The Sydney funnel-web is restricted to the region bounded by Nowra, Newcastle and Lithgow. Though mostly a ground-dwelling spider, some species do live up to 30 metres above ground in the rainforests of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. The largest of the group (five centimetres long), the northern tree funnel-web (*Hadronyche formidabilis*), is one such species.

Having spent my youth tramping through the rainforests of the Lamington plateau, I am lucky the funnel-web was not one of the numerous venomous creatures I encountered. Wild readers will know that, as for snake bites, the pressure-immobilisation bandaging technique is the recommended first-aid method for this spider bite. By blocking the movement of the venom through the low-pressure lymphatic vessels, this technique can effectively stop the clock on the progression of the envenomation. You should, of course, treat any bite from a large, black, hairy Australian spider as potentially dangerous.



Visit [avru.org](http://avru.org) for more details on venomous injuries.

Learn more about funnel-webs at [australianmuseum.net.au/](http://australianmuseum.net.au/)

Funnel-web-spiders-group

## Dr Ken Winkel

Dr Ken Winkel is director of the Australian Venom Research Unit at the University of Melbourne, a member of the Wilderness Medical Society and co-author of the first book on venomous bites and stings in Papua New Guinea.

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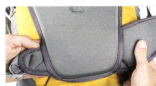
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# Wilderness Society targets fossil fuels

Australia's biggest environmental group is launching a major legal fight against the fossil fuel industry as it shifts focus to climate change for the first time in its 37-year history. Having traditionally campaigned to protect native forests, bush and coastlines, The Wilderness Society believes it can no longer ignore the impact of carbon emissions on the natural landscape. National campaigner Glenn Walker said: "Having spent the last two years analysing the science and the pressures on our beautiful wild places from fossil fuel developments, we're now going straight to the source."

"The feedback [on the step-change] from our members and other conservation groups has been incredibly positive and energetic as they all understand the very close link between the survival of the places we love and climate change," he added.

A "significant resource" will now be diverted to campaigning against fossil fuel developers and investors, starting with the community blockade of the proposed Maules Creek coal mine in New



South Wales. Maules Creek and the Pilliga forest, where there are plans for up to 1,100 coal seam gas wells, comprise two of the last intact temperate eucalypt woodlands in the state. Walker said campaigning will include targeting ANZ Bank as a potential investor, both through active dialogue and public shaming.

He added: "We have to do a lot of research to grasp where the sites of fossil fuel projects are going to be because a lot of the deals happen behind closed doors."

The group will also focus on protecting the Cooper Basin, Canning Basin, Great Australian Bight and Arkaroola Basin in 2014. The latter is thought to contain an equivalent amount of shale oil as Saudi Arabia and nearly as much coal as the US.

While Australia's fossil fuel exports do not fall under the carbon tax, the Climate Council insists 80 per cent of reserves must stay in the ground if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.

## The cattle prattle continues

Conservationists are bewildered that the prospect of reintroducing cattle into Victoria's Alpine National Park has again reared its head, writes Cam Walker.

The long-running debate about whether cattle should be reintroduced into the Alpine National Park entered a new phase at the end of last year, with the Victorian government seeking federal approval for a three-year grazing trial in the Wonnangatta Valley. Graziers claim cattle would reduce the region's risk of severe bushfires by eating the vegetation that fuels the flames, but a raft of scientific literature—including recent research by scientists at the University of Tasmania and University of Melbourne—contradicts this. While grazing has long been banned in the High Country in New South Wales, cattle were only excluded from the Alpine National Park in 2005 over concerns that the animals degrade the area's sensitive biodiversity. When the Coalition came to power in Victoria

in 2010, it supported plans for a grazing trial of 400 head of cattle but was blocked by the then-Labor federal environment minister on the grounds it would have an unacceptable impact on endangered species by spreading weeds, triggering erosion and fouling streams. Graziers claim the land around the historic Wonnangatta Station has since become a firetrap and overgrown with invasive weeds. Opponents believe proven fire reduction strategies should be employed in any event. The newly proposed trial would cover 2,200 hectares of relatively low-lying land. The head

of the Mountain Cattleman Association of Victoria is reported as saying he hopes this will reopen access to a broader area. Evidence shows that while grazing may reduce the risk of grassland fires, it does not reduce the shrubs or bark responsible for fuelling dangerous eucalypt forest fires. Environmentalists are concerned about the scientific rigour of the trial and, at the time of writing, fear the federal government will approve the trial as soon as January in line with its plan to hand-off environmental powers to state governments.



## Insurance population of Tassie devils booming

The first group of Tasmanian devils born on the mainland have been released on Maria Island, which is a safe haven from the deadly facial tumour disease. The 11 devils are part of a captive breeding program involving 600 animals and

represent a milestone in the fight to save the threatened marsupial. Another group of healthy devils relocated to Maria Island in 2012 have since had 20 babies. Experts claim captive-bred devils revert to wild animal behaviour within a few

months, while bushwalkers on the Maria Island Walk have reported their boots being stolen by the den-building animals. Plans are in motion to reintroduce healthy devils on Tasman Island and the Forester Peninsula in 2015.





## Bob Brown's green living

The image of bulldozers moving towards a shallow reef habitat in East Gippsland gives Bob Brown nightmares

When the Vandals swept into Rome in 455AD they looted, raped and burned. The vulgarity of their behaviour has etched them a notorious place in the English language. A vandal is a selfish, cruel, needless destroyer, and pretty stupid.

At the far south-east tip of the Australian continent, on the Croajingalong Coast, is Bastion Point. It is a rocky headland that is placed in just about as pleasant a coastal area as the world provides, with its lakes, lagoons, waterbirds, coastal woodlands, panoramic cliff-top views and humpback whales in the migratory season. A couple of years ago, Paul and I camped for a night in a teatree thicket high above the ocean near Mallacoota, listening to the ringtail possums whistling beneath a full moon. After a brilliant sunrise, we descended to a deserted beach for a swim and walk along the sand, staying near the water to avoid the chance of plodding through the camouflaged nests and eggs of the anxious local dotterels and oystercatchers. But why bother? While some folk are tippy-toeing to avoid harming nature, others are arriving with truckloads of dynamite to blast it to smithereens. At Bastion Point, the officially authorised vandals have arrived.

This unique natural gem is about to be enhanced with a bitumen road, new two-lane boat ramp with a dredge and 130-metre-long breakwater to support the abalone industry. The Bastion Point reef, an ancient nursery for many species of sea life, is not the right geometry for the invaders and so will be blasted into shape. If Bastion Point, with its curl of waves, is to be smashed, there's little chance for any of the other remaining little headlands, coves or fish nurseries in the world. Isn't it quaint that on some parts of our rapidly transmogrifying Australian coastline we are sinking rusty ships to create fake meccas for underwater adventurers while on others we're blasting the bejesus out of fertile, natural reefs that should be kept for authentic underwater experiences?

There is a brave group of local residents fighting to save Bastion Point in favour of a lower impact, more economic boat ramp. Excavation and vegetation clearing started in November, with plans to resume in February, but you can help. If you are near Melbourne, Sydney, Wollongong or Canberra, take a couple of days holiday in Mallacoota and visit Bastion Point. Send the politest letter possible to the reef wreckers and the local, state and federal politicians who should be protecting this beautiful corner of our nation. A donation or letter of encouragement to the reef defenders would also be a help. And spread the word, because public opinion is vital for Bastion Point and for all the shore-based wildlife, in and out of the sea, which it has regenerated and harboured for so long.



[savebastionpoint.org](http://savebastionpoint.org)



Bastion Point in December  
Photo: Julie Parker

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## Lenore Lyons and David Bomba of Out of Sight Tours tell *Wild* about their responsible outdoor lifestyle

**Lenore Lyons:** "We're based in Denmark and started taking tours to Cape Howe about seven years ago. It's an unusual part of the coastline, with dark dolerite cliffs that drop 90 metres to the Southern Ocean, and one of the few places in WA where you can see the break up of Gondwanaland etched in the rock. We also lead four-day walks on the Walpole to Albany section of the Bibbulmun Track."

**David Bomba (aka The Adventure Doctor):**

"I grew up in South Africa and my first impression of exploring the Australian landscape in the 1970s was how wild and carefree things seemed. I did the Overland Track in my teens and numerous walks in Kosciuszko National Park, but my greatest delight came from the southern half of the Bibb Track. It's the sheer diversity of ecosystems that's impressive; forests, limestone cliffs, granite mountain peaks, coastal heaths, rivers and swamps. A lot of visitors from eastern states are shocked to see the difference in the coastline here."

**LL:** "We recently won the gold medal for ecotourism at the 2013 Western Australia Tourism Awards, and Dave the Golden Guide Award, which is really exciting because environmental protection is at the heart of everything we do. We seek to leave the places we visit in a better condition than we find them and provoke discussion about the sustainability of our pristine areas."

**DB:** "We take out a mixture of experienced international hikers and young Australian families who are new to bushwalking, and rather than lecture we try to show them a model for best practice. I advise people on Leave No Trace principles like carry it in, carry it out, but also encourage them not to rush their time on the trail."

**LL:** "On the 4WD track to Cape Howe we often stop to pick up rubbish; you wouldn't believe what people still throw away inside national parks. We stick to marked trails, carry



Dr Dave



Lenore Lyons

sterilising spray to avoid spreading Phytophthora dieback and limit out groups to five people. All our guides have a post-graduate qualification in a scientific field so they can offer a detailed interpretation of the short and long history of the landscape. The south-west corner of WA is Australia's only internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot and the diversity of endemic species and geology is quite amazing."

**DB:** "Although bushwalking is our day job, we do the same on our holidays. In my downtime I like to walk in Wilson Head Reserve because you feel like the only person on the planet, and there is some rock hopping involved to beat the tide through a squeeze that leads to a secret beach. I also love swimming in Greens Pool in William Bay National Park, on the right day it's just magic."

**LL:** "I never cease to be inspired by the giant tingle trees with their 30-metre wide buttresses, and I love walking in the Stirling Range where you can be happy in a T-shirt at the bottom and shivering into your thermos at the summit."

## No end in sight for dieback

The cure to plant disease Phytophthora dieback is a long way off, according to one of Western Australia's leading environmental scientists. David Coates, head of the WA government's Flora Conservation and Herbarium Program, said the soil-borne pathogen is not being researched enough despite being the most significant threat to the world-renowned biodiversity of the state's south-west.

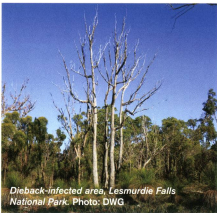
The disease, which attacks the roots of plants including banksias, has eradicated plant populations in iconic areas such as Stirling Range National Park and spread to Fitzgerald River National Park in 2012.

Coates told *The West Australian*: "We are doing a bit of science but we're probably not doing as much as would be nice to do. To go from an idea, to doing the research, to developing a control is probably a fair way off."

Efforts to combat Phytophthora dieback, which can be spread in infested soil on bushwalkers' boots and equipment, have included spraying susceptible plants with a phosphite treatment that boosts their natural defences.

Coates said the disease will likely go on to cause catastrophic damage across some of WA's most pristine places over the next 20 years if a more effective solution is not found.

The Dieback Working Group runs hygiene training for communities across the south-west and will host its annual conference at Perth's Murdoch University on July 18.



Dieback-infected area, Lesmurdie Falls National Park. Photo: DWG

## Sniffer dogs called in to fight hawkweed

Dogs may be called on to sniff out hawkweed in the Australian Alps. Three species of the aggressive plant, which releases chemicals into the soil that inhibits the growth of other plants, have been found in the region. Based on its impact on parts of the New Zealand landscape, park authorities fear the weed has

the potential to be highly invasive in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. Parks Victoria has trained a spaniel to pick up the smell of hawkweed in different habitats, with the hope that a team of dogs could identify the plants to be destroyed much quicker than volunteers on foot are able to.

Orange hawkweed has the potential to seriously degrade Australian ecosystems



# Aussie doco captures plight of the great apes

An Australian-produced documentary entitled *The Last of the Great Apes* is set to hit TV screens this year

A 3D nature documentary produced by Brisbane-based Visionquest and set for release in 2014 aims to raise public awareness of the myriad threats facing apes.

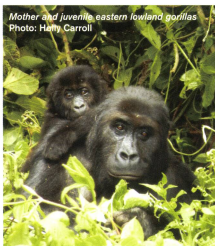
With the help of Alaskan-born primatologist Holly Carroll, a seven-strong Australian crew spent 18 months trekking through the Congo, Tanzania, Rwanda, Borneo and Sumatra to capture unique footage of chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans in their natural habitat.

Carroll told *Wild*: "Not only was getting permits to be at the locations at the right time of year immensely challenging, but the 3D camera weighs around 18 kilograms so it's not easy to capture spontaneous, free-ranging animals."

She added: "We saw that the threats for the great apes are pervasive and ever-present, with deforestation, poaching and illegal pet trafficking killing thousands each year."

The rate at which orangutans in particular are losing their forests to palm oil plantations has led biologists to predict they will be extinct within 20 years.

Carroll, who is a Jane Goodall Institute Australia ambassador, came up with the idea for a six-part television series about endangered apes after filming a BBC documentary about baboons in



Mother and juvenile eastern lowland gorillas  
Photo: Holly Carroll

Tanzania's Mikumi National Park and seeing how it inspired viewers to get involved in conservation.

She said: "My hope is this film will educate audiences to care for apes and to become more aware of how to save them from extinction."

She is a supporter of commercial wildlife treks and believes zoos have a role to play in conservation but need better regulation.

"I would recommend gorilla tracking in Uganda, Rwanda and even the DRC as all of the national parks in these places seem to be well-

run and have the health of the gorillas as a top priority, but you definitely have to be prepared for tough hiking," she advised.

For those not averse to steep hikes she recommends tracking chimpanzees in the Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania.

The growing popularity of ape tracking tours that support reforestation, such as those offered by Melbourne-based Orangutan Odysseys, suggests travellers want to feel more connected to the places they visit for wildlife watching.

Carroll said her most memorable moment of the expedition was at Camp Leakey in Borneo, when a wild, adult female with an infant walked right up to her until close enough to touch.

"Direct eye contact is seen as a threat by many monkeys and apes, but orangutans want to look into your eyes as if to assess you; it was as if I was looking into the face of another sentient, compassionate being and the trust that her actions conveyed was humbling," she recalled. She also explained that apes who are rescued from the illegal pet trade as infants often die from the trauma, while sanctuaries are losing wild habitat to return them to.



[thelastofthegreatapes.com](http://thelastofthegreatapes.com)

## Woodchips

### Victorians have their say on parks

Victorians are being asked to identify their favourite parks, what they enjoy about them and how they can be improved in a unique online survey. The Parks Victoria questionnaire, which takes around 15 minutes to complete, allows users to place markers on a map identifying the natural areas they care about most. It is the first time such geospatial data has been gathered on a state-wide scale. Everyone who participates before January 31 will receive either a \$10 Amazon voucher, Hoyts movie pass or credit to donate to a selection of charities. [parks.victoria.net](http://parks.victoria.net)

### Hope springs that policymakers gone soft on Tassie forests

Conservationists are hoping against hope that the federal government's commitment to fund the Tasmanian Forest Agreement council until mid-2014 reflects a softening of its pledge to revoke the peace deal. Government authorities insist, however, that the Commonwealth funding is simply a

contractual obligation. At the time of writing, details of how the government might legally undo the extension of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area without renouncing support for the World Heritage Convention are yet to be revealed.

### Report claims we monitor to extinction

An Australian Research Council paper entitled *Counting the books while the library burns* claims that many wildlife programs around the world are monitoring species to the point of extinction without stepping in to save them. Around 21,000 species of the world's 70,000 known animals and plants are considered threatened, with at least 10 vertebrate species having gone extinct since the start of the 21st century. The paper calls for environmental scientists to learn from past failures, such as the loss of the Christmas Island pipistrelle bat and greater glider in Booderee National Park, and ensure that well-defined trigger points for pre-planned intervention are included in any monitoring program.

### Landmark conservation agreement in Europe

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia have signed a historical agreement to cooperate on conservation and sustainable development across the Adriatic region. The agreement endorses the creation of two new national parks, 10 protected landscapes and three protected marine areas, paving the way for a boom in nature-based tourism. The region in south-eastern Europe has been identified as a place of global importance for its biodiversity, with the largest European virgin forest, the world's second deepest canyon and healthy populations of large carnivores such as bears, lynx and wolves.

### Park opens to battery-powered 'walks'

Townsville has become the first Australian city to allow Segways into a protected area. In December, the Queensland government approved the use of the stand-on vehicles in Townsville Town Common Conservation Park, based on claims they have less of an impact than mountain bikes.





Coffin Bay, SA  
Photos: Quentin Chester



## Time travel and the naval tradition

**While strolling limestone bluffs on the other side of the Pacific, *Quentin Chester* is still somehow reminded of home**

Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin was one of those grand British Navy geezers from the late 18th century. Born in Boston Massachusetts in 1759, he spent much of his life sailing the high seas on both sides of the Atlantic. The other day I was taking a walk and Mr Coffin sprang to mind. Oddly enough, the park I was wandering hugged the outskirts of Kansas City, USA; one of the least maritime places on the planet. It was a baking summer's day. Puffy white clouds coasted overhead and the air chirred with insect noise. Nothing seemed familiar there. Though grateful for their pools of shade, I didn't recognise any of the trees. Oaks? Hickory? Every birdcall sounded strangely off-key. Even the occasional squirrel skittering along a nearby branch seemed surreal and cartoonish.

When your senses have grown so keyed into the scents and forms of home, it's a

shaky feeling to be somewhere utterly new. Still, I kept walking, happy for the exercise and the filtered, pale-green glow inside these North American woods.

There must have been a time when I could hike just for the hell of it. Perhaps, before I became a bush tragic, walking was about getting there or going fast or feeling strong. But that kind of blithe transit is long gone. Instead, by turns of instinct and need, I've become a chronic observer. My head spins with unbidden data. Random connections? I'm your man.

So there I was, tramping beside Fox Hollow Creek trying to keep my compulsion at bay. The trail skirted a deep valley, slipping among small rock outcrops. At times I would skedaddle from the trail proper on to the brink of the limestone bluffs. I liked the view into the trees from these craggy edges. Better still, my improvised path was full of hops

and lunging steps. This was walking with a twist. It had me teetering on ledges and jumping the gaps between bluffs. For a time I was cruising along undistractedly. But then, airborne above a mini-crevasse, I thought of good old Sir Isaac.

Just a few weeks earlier I'd spent several days poncing about a very different limestone rim. The south-western tip of SA's Eyre Peninsula is a big hammer-shaped headland—another peninsula in its own right. This crumbling rock fortress is lathered with sand dunes and encloses one of the most sheltered and sublime waterways in the land. Fox Hollow Creek it ain't.

Matthew Flinders aboard HMS Investigator first charted these waters in early 1802 and gave the place the less than alluring name of Coffin Bay. He even branded the sharp northern tip of the hammerhead Point Sir Isaac.

Of course, the admiral never got within cooee of Australia. Our Matthew was simply honouring the favours Coffin had bestowed on the Investigator expedition before its departure from the Sheerness dockyard. Thus, embedded in rocks and dunes on the far side of the planet, is the memory of yet another naval bigwig.

The exposed shores of Coffin Bay's peninsula are scalloped with surf beaches, cliffs and rocky bluffs. A few eons of Southern Ocean fury have carved the

severely undercut. Other surfaces can be pitted and disconcertingly hollow. At times it feels like you're teetering on giant crockery rather than anything resembling firm ground. However, there are upsides. For starters, all that bare rock means you're not fighting through a tangle of scratchy, snagging undergrowth. The way forward is open and untrammelled. And you get to gulp in big coastal scenery. Then there's the business of covering ground. Navigating along six kilometres of clifftop brings a

in polar ice caps. With sea levels lower and fierce south-westerly gales raging, the exposed sea floor was quarried by the wind to form mighty onshore deposits. Thus, in trekking the coast near Reef Point, I plodded along atop the remnants of corals and other marine organisms.

You could say limestone is the graveyard of oceans past. In other words, when strangers at parties ask me what I do, I can say I'm into bushwalking on skeletons. And suddenly Coffin Bay doesn't seem like such an odd name for this place after all.

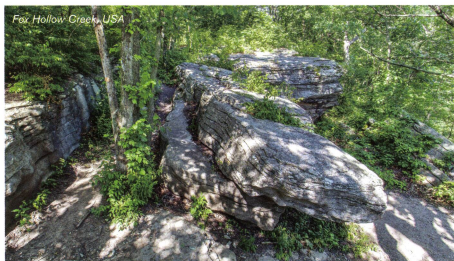
Another thing to ponder on is that the more recent sea level ups and downs happened within the span of human history. As we as a community contemplate a self-induced sea level rise, we can only try to imagine the last inundation around 10,000 years ago. A time of dislocation when the first Australians saw the land bridge to Tassie disappear and vast areas of coastal homeland slip beneath the waves. The Bridgewater Formation is a chronicle of this change. In its fossil deposits and eerie pipe formations like petrified forests, this rock is a monument to the kind of forces that day by day, and century by century, shape our lives.

This limestone gets its identity from Cape Bridgewater. That towering Victorian sea cliff was in turn named after Francis Egerton, the eighth Earl of Bridgewater. A classic wealthy, unmarried English eccentric, Francis liked to give dinner parties for dogs. His other fetish was wearing a new pair of shoes every day. The used pairs were neatly arranged in rows. It pleased the earl to see them ranked together day after day. You see, like the limestone that bears his name, the earl was into revealing the passing of time.

That's what I like about geology. It's a headspin that takes me back, and sideways too. So on a hot afternoon on the edge of Kansas, smack bang in the centre of a continent, I get to consider a time 300 million years earlier; a time when the heart of North America was a vast inland sea. A time when the relics of trillions of marine creatures that ended up on the sea floor would rise again as the crags I can wander above Fox Hollow Creek.

That's also why I love every walking moment of being on foot. The way the mind, as you move, plays tricks, takes wild steps and makes leaps of faith. How I can be in middle America and find myself musing about fossils, ancient sea levels and old English admirals. And how I can be there and, through the power of stone, keep alive the feeling of rambling atop sea cliffs 10,000 miles away on the raggedy tip of Eyre Peninsula. [W](#)

Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and author of six books about wilderness places. [Quentinchester.com](http://Quentinchester.com)



limestone into fanciful forms. Everywhere you look there are prows, caverns, arches and fallen blocks like busted battlements.

Take Reef Point on the western flank of the peninsula: this place cops a thumping from storms charging out of the Great Australian Bight. Walking the coast south from here to Boarding House Bay is like stepping among the ruins of a baroque cathedral. As waves thunder on reefs offshore you tiptoe along the limestone rim. Below lie ornate wave-cut terraces and eroded pillars. In places, the wind has whittled the rock into blades as thin as a tuille biscuit.

As fate would have it, I've spent a lot of wandering days on coastal limestone. Not surprising I guess, given that most of the underside of the continent is edged in the stuff. From Cape Bridgewater in western Victoria all the way past South Australia's gulfs to the mighty ramparts of the Nullabor and beyond, it's limestone that sets the stage.

Mind you, as rock types go, these are not cliffs that inspire confidence. Any self-respecting climber would sooner set their underwear on fire than launch on to walls this loose and brittle. The world has some great limestone cliffs to venture up—Verdon Gorge in France, Thailand's sea stacks, High Tor in the UK—but our flaky seaside heaps aren't any of them.

Even mooching about on top you need to stay on your toes. Many cliff edges are

certain frisson of stepping out. The pivots, the strides and those little leaps of faith—the same kind of tango that got me going at Fox Hollow Creek in Kansas.

Meanwhile, down at boot level these wobbly pavements, with all their broken fissures and scoops, are full of lavish details. Come spring the miniature gardens of lichens, dimpled rock pools and bonsai heath plants are splodged with colour.

This is rock as habitat, a world of crevices where life—nutrients, plant roots, insects and lizards—sneaks in. On the steep faces below swallows flit among the honeycombed pockets, while out on lonely sea stacks all around Coffin Bay stand plinths of sticks piled tall by nesting ospreys.

It's fitting that limestone, in its very essence, is also a telling record of life itself. More than any other mineral kingdom it ties us to a recent geological past of glaciations, changing climate, scouring winds and sea level rises and falls.

Much of Australia's southern shoreline is the limestone from the Bridgewater Formation. Born out of windblown dunes, this rock is calcareous; a massive accumulation of shell fragments that hardens through chemical action to form a hard calccrete crust. This dune-building occurred over the past few 100,000 years—a snip in geological terms.

At various times over this period much more of the world's oceans were locked up

# The koala crusader

Australian Koala Foundation chief *Deborah Tabart* tells *Wild* of her ups and downs in the fight to protect a national icon

**D**eborah Tabart, otherwise known as The Koala Woman, does not mince her words. After a quarter of a century campaigning for koala habitat protection, she says land developers and politicians have never been more avaricious or dismissive of environmental science. But far from siding with the pessimists who predict the extinction of the species within 50 years, she has faith in the Australian public and her rapidly growing 'Koala Army'.

"The next phase of my career is going to be the most important," she says. "Our politicians have no respect for science so this is basically a war and I'm the commander-in-chief, I even have dog tags." There are estimated to be fewer than 80,000 koalas left in the wild, despite them being listed as protected since 1936 and classified as 'vulnerable' in the ACT, New South Wales and Queensland in 2012. Land clearing, logging and urban development together with the stress, car accidents and dog attacks these bring have contributed to an 80 per cent decline in koala habitat in the last 200 years, which is exacerbated by disease and bushfire.

Having led the independent Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) out of obscurity to become the world's biggest lobby group for a single species, and one that receives upward of 15 million website hits a month, Deborah believes 2014 will be a pivotal year for our cutest national emblem.

The AKF officially submitted its Koala Protection Bill for parliamentary debate last year, which if enacted would make it illegal to damage koala habitat in areas where the animal has been listed as threatened. Taking inspiration from the 1942 Bald Eagle Act in the US, Deborah sees a koala-specific law as a way to crystallise Australian identity as well as prevent harm to koalas.

She explains: "When the British arrived here they deemed the koala ugly and set about transforming the ghastly gum trees into a pretty English landscape; we still haven't developed who we are.

She adds: "We need simpler legislation because red tape and developers being seen to jump through hoops does not mean



*Deborah says: "I have an easy sell compared to some conservationists; koalas can't eat people." Photo: AKF*

protection or intrinsic respect for the bush, it keeps the bush as a commodity."

The new law would prevent a recurrence a scandal like last year's involving Australian Bluegum Plantations, whose chief sits on the Forest Stewardship Council board despite the company losing its environmental accreditation when footage of maimed koalas in its timber fields in Victoria emerged.

In speeches, Deborah often finds herself referring to classic children's book *The Magic Pudding* for its representation of our complacency about Australia's abundant natural resources. She says: "I can't bear the thought of the next generation not knowing what a drop bear joke means.

"Many of us are in denial about the destruction being wrought by industry but it's as if [business] are destroying koala

habitat completely so they won't have to deal with environmental laws in the future." Meanwhile, koalas are thought to be worth more than \$1bn to the Australian tourism industry each year factoring in zoos and memorabilia.

Having attended the 10-month-long senate enquiry into the health of the koala in 2011, Deborah believes too many politicians openly prize the votes of property developers above the survival of native wildlife. She calls the Queensland government's \$22m land buyback scheme a PR stunt that will secure little more than a "stamp-sized" area of likely unsuitable koala habitat, and which is offset by plans for a new quartzite quarry in the state's south-east. Meanwhile, the recommendation by Queensland's Threatened Species Scientific Committee that koala status be upgraded to 'endangered' goes ignored.

And yet, Deborah has never been anti-development. She explains: "I'd rather ask developers how the AKF can help them than oppose them."

She recently took a BBC documentary crew to Koala Beach, the 600-dwelling residential area in northern New South Wales designed to be wildlife-friendly, where they were stunned to see residents driving slower than normal and a koala using a pedestrian crossing.

Planners and property holders have the data they need to act in an environmentally sustainable way thanks to the AKF's Koala Habitat Atlas, which saw the trees on more than four million hectares mapped and graded in terms of suitability for koalas. The interactive map is designed to encourage regeneration across the wider landscape, considering the majority of koala habitat is on private land, and confirms that koala populations in different areas prefer to feed on different types of gum trees.

After coordinating \$8m worth of research, Deborah believes policymakers can no longer use the excuse of insufficient data to delay the protection of koalas and koala trees. She says: "The problem for politicians is our maps are too accurate now, if I hear 'we better do some research' one more time I'll throw up."

In the run-up to the federal election, the AKF assessed how many koalas remain in each electorate and which candidates would support a koala protection act. "The results even shocked me and I deal with these issues every day," says Deborah. Only seven of the 127 electorates in the koala's geographic range were shown to contain more than 5,000 animals, with only nine others playing host to potentially sustainable populations of around 1,000. For some, the fact the 2013 election fell on the same date the last Tasmanian tiger died in 1936 was seen as a portent of doom for Australia's native species.

The argument that koalas are overpopulating certain areas, which prevents them from a threatened listing in Victoria, does not hold much weight with Deborah. She explains: "Zoos and zoo-like translocations of koalas are deluding people. Reintroduction programs are rarely successful and the relocation of koalas often supports populations with reduced genetic vigour and social structure disorder, which are then unable to disperse because the forests are fragmented."

According to the AKF, which proposes proactive tree-planting rather than relocating koalas to avoid tree degradation, the species should not be considered as one mega-population that can be culled in one area and topped-up in another.



Photo: Tourism Australia

Deborah says the messages of support she receives from all over the world, from people of all ages, are what keep her going. "I'm constantly staggered by the passion with which people ask me to reclaim Australia, and I will spend the rest of my life arguing that our wild places can and must continue to exist," she adds.

She is disappointed, however, that conservation groups in Australia are not able to band together more effectively. "When I was younger people diminished me for being a single mother at the head of an organisation and essentially spouting common sense, but I don't care what people think about me anymore," she adds.

In 2008, Deborah was awarded the Order of Australia for her service to conservation, one of only two women among 26 to receive the honour that year. She admits: "Now when people I don't like come in for a meeting I wear the medal so they have to sit and look at it."

As someone who practices the sustainable lifestyle she preaches, Deborah says her own five-acre permaculture garden west of Brisbane gives her hope for the process of habitat restoration. "The conclusion at the 2009 climate talks in Copenhagen was that we wouldn't have any koala food trees remaining by the end of the century but I refuse to believe that because my garden, which was barren 30 years ago as a result of sheep grazing, has been rewilded and even has its own microclimate," she says. Koala chat is banned from the dinner table, but she can always be relied upon to have recyclable spoons and water bottles in her handbag. She says: "I like to holiday in places where you don't have to worry about the environment but there aren't many places left like that; once you have an eye for what's wrong you become boring."

Having recently swum with whale sharks in Western Australia, she next wants to see brown bears in the wild.

Unfortunately, a holiday seems a long way off. Deborah says: "I feel like I need 10 more lifetimes to complete my work and I'm totally dedicated to the Koala Protection Act. If we want to have beautiful things we've got to have the bush, and if we don't teach our children to live harmoniously with wildlife then it's all a waste of time." **W**



savethekoala.com



Great Koala Count ecologist Dr Grainne Cleary. Photo: NPANSW

## KOALA COUNTING

More than 850 people recorded around 920 koala sightings in New South Wales and south-east Queensland during the inaugural Great Koala Count over 10 days in November. A koala hotspot was found around Gunnedah, Narrabri and Tamworth, while around 320 locations absent of koalas were also logged via the BioTag smartphone app. The citizen science initiative will be extended to Queensland, South Australia and Victoria this year. [greatkoalacount.nsw.gov.au](http://greatkoalacount.nsw.gov.au)





*Traditional dancers, Malekula Island*  
Photos: Grant Dixon

# Melanesian MEMORIES

The giant banyan trees, lava-spitting craters, crystal-clear water and ancient culture of Vanuatu's Malampa Province captivate *Ed Hill*

As a result of its association with swim-up bars and package holidays, Vanuatu is largely unknown as an outdoor adventure destination. But a mere three-hour flight from Sydney, this Y-shaped archipelago of 83 islands boasts unique flora, seven active volcanos, largely pristine marine and terrestrial environments and a fascinating indigenous culture. On an 18-day trek with eight other Australians I would visit eight islands, 17 villages and hear 10 different local languages.

On the grass airstrip at Norsup in Malampa Province, Robert Ravun, a strongly built and highly ranking tribesman from the jungle of Malekula Island, waits to take us along the Manbush Trail. As the group piles into the back of a Hilux ute for the rough two-hour drive to the start of the walk, Robert explains his aim is to teach us the way of 'Man Bush', or people from the rugged interior. His passion and pride for his culture shine through every word, his eyes lighting up as he explains the use of almost every plant he sees. He seems a little disappointed to find we have brought tents, telling us about the bush shelters he'll make for us on the mountain.

While we tuck into a lunch of freshwater prawns and taro roots, we learn that we are to ditch pots, pans, packed food and tarps for the next four days and rely purely on kastom, or traditional practices. All we'll need, Robert insists, is a machete and a few thousand years of bush knowledge; we'll even boil our tea inside bamboo. Our porters prove the point when they arrive with nothing but machetes and matches, shunning both backpacks and shoes.

The route is a challenging one over mountainous terrain, through gardens, jungles, cloud forest and remote highland villages. We sleep in bamboo huts in local villages or pitched tents. On the second night we camp atop Mount Laimbele, 750 metres above sea level, in a sizeable, sturdy and dry

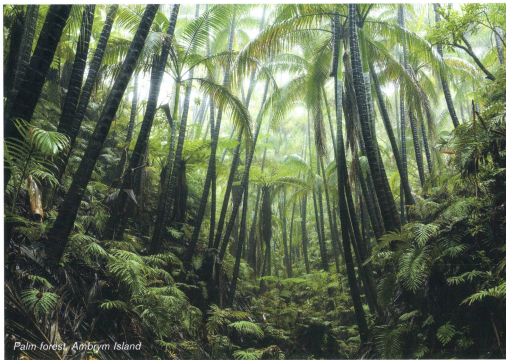
shelter made of timber and leaves.

We gather all our food along the way, including energy-rich yams, ferns, tree spinach, fish and eels. I eventually get used to seeing a guide appear ahead of me on the track carrying bunches of bananas and root vegetables as if they materialised from thin air. While crossing one of more than a dozen crystal-clear rivers we pass a young man on his way to catch us a wild pig for dinner with seven dogs and a seven-foot long spear.

Stopping at a thicket of mature bamboo, one of the porters cuts a small hole in a section of a trunk before offering me a small growing tip to use as a straw to drink the water inside. The others then cut off large single stems to use as cooking pots and water containers in camp that night. We cut meat and vegetables into smallish pieces and place them inside the green

bamboo sections, sealing the top with a leaf and bush string. The green bamboo sections are then laid over a hot fire in a xylophone pattern on the coals. When the bamboo is blackened we split these sections in half and pour the tender meat and vegetables on to large green leaves that act as plates.

The Manbush Trail is an ancient trading route beside which tribesmen would plant food to eat on each journey. None of us have felt the need to tuck into our scroggin yet and before leaving camp the guides plant tree spinach cuttings, taro and bananas for next time. At the top of a steep ascent the porters run ahead to construct tables from leaves and sticks, and lay out a spread of paw paws, sweet pomelo (giant grapefruit), sugar cane, cocoa beans, mandarins, nuts and drinking coconuts with bamboo—all found nearby and



Palm forest, Ambrym Island



decorated with hibiscus and native ginger flowers. I realise that drinking coconuts are a bushman's sports drink, full of electrolytes and energy; ideal after ascending steep and slippery ridgelines in steamy tropical forest.

We reach the coast again at South West Bay, a beautiful black sand beach home to around 1,000 people in six villages and only accessible by foot or boat. We rest for two nights in basic but comfortable bungalows, eating lots of fresh fish in coconut milk soup.

Magic is a central force in Ni-Vanuatu society and during our stay the chief arranges a traditional dance to ensure octopus stocks are plentiful. Dancers wear elaborate, conical clay masks featuring tentacle-like decorations. There are three chiefs in the local area: one to oversee ceremonies that ensure food is plentiful, one who represents the tribe's interests in disputes as head of the warriors, and a primary chief who presides over it all.

Heading inland again we climb over forested ranges towards the south coast of Malekula, following an open forest ridge and passing many large strangler figs, some the size of apartment blocks. We're hoping to spot the endemic chestnut-bellied kingfisher common in the area but mostly absent elsewhere in the country. Our porters explain that if it was sunnier we'd see them hiding in the shady canopy, but unfortunately the mist settles in.

Our target is the Matanoi River, whose headwaters wind through inaccessible gorges and jungles. Its valley broadens as we near the coast, with wild cane thickets lining the banks. We eventually meet the river about 10 kilometres inland and cross many times. We follow the recently cut paths for high school students who walk from southern villages to attend the boarding school at South West Bay. This explains why a school we visit in Wintua includes a machete along with books and pens on its list of student essentials. By mid-afternoon we reach a spacious, sandy campsite. Before we finish our rice noodles and dried vegetable laksa, the porters return from up river with dozens of large fish, making me question the value of carrying even the smallest of food rations.

We spend the next few days alternating between walking and travelling in open fibreglass boats with outboard motors, and receive a formal Pacific Island welcome in many villages on the way complete with speeches, music, salu salu necklaces and a kava ceremony. It turns out we're the first Western group to make the journey along this section of the south coast.





Off the south-eastern tip of Malekula lie the nine Maskelyne Islands. While most people live on the main island of Uliveo, they plant their gardens on other islands and the mainland. As the dug-out sail canoe capital of Vanuatu, everyone sails or paddles everywhere using the many mangrove and reef channels like roads. Tidal movements, which create strong currents in the channels, naturally dictate people's movements to and from their gardens.

Joining a locally run sail canoe tour, we take to fibreglass catamaran canoes with recycled windsurfer sails to visit five of the islands, some uninhabited. The Maskelyne archipelago has one of the largest reef systems in the country, as well as the largest area of mangroves and extensive seagrass beds. Chiefs manage the marine environment through seasonal and

permanent closures of certain areas, and it is teeming with large fish as a result. Some of the lucky snorkellers in the group also spot turtles and dugongs.

The canoeing is easy and we're often pushed along by a light breeze, which makes a nice change from muddy, mountainous walks. We keep our energy up by gorging on mud crabs, lobster, oysters and a huge variety of fruit and vegetables before making the 30-kilometre crossing to Ambrym Island aboard two small motorboats.

Ambrym volcano is one of the most active volcanos in the South Pacific and one

of the few places in the world where walkers can closely observe the raw power of boiling lava lakes. There have been extensive new flows as recently as 1988, and in 1939 many villages were evacuated before lava and ash falls wiped them out. The plan is to climb from sea level in the south-west to a base camp on the ash plain at 750 metres, explore both active craters and then descend to the north coast.

We begin with flat walking up a large, dry river in intense humidity. The sweat pours off me as I walk beneath trees festooned with mosses and climb small, dry waterfalls. In sections the slopes are

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

- Excluding Saturdays, Air Vanuatu flies daily to Malekula's main airport of Norsup from Vila and Santo on the more touristy island of Espiritu Santo. [airvanuatu.com](http://airvanuatu.com)
- Willis's Walkabouts is running a Malampa Adventure Trek and Island Hop in August in partnership with three local ecotourism operators priced \$2,995 excluding international flights. [bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://bushwalkingholidays.com.au)

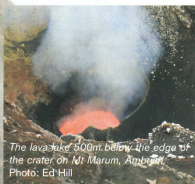


Fisherman of Akhamb Island





Peering into the guts of the Earth  
on Ambrym Island.



The lava lake 500m below the edge of the crater on Mt Marum, Ambrym.  
Photo: Ed Hill

very steep, but the quick-draining volcanic ground grips easier underfoot than the mud of Malekula.

After three and half hours we break out of the stunted cloud forest on to a stark ash plain. The transition takes my breath away, as if I've landed on another planet. Black plains stretch out for three kilometres

towards the two active craters, and after following the edge of the forest a short distance we set up camp in a beautiful but sheltered area.

As we've made good time, experienced guide John Tasso suggests an afternoon walk to the crater of Marum and I'm amazed at the diversity of vegetation on

what first appeared a barren moonscape. Bright green mosses contrast vividly with crusty black ash. Looking more closely, we see lycopods, orchids, grasses and lilies, which thrive despite the extreme exposure and acid rain. After passing the 1988 lava flow, which looks like a giant ploughed field of soft earth but is actually jagged and glassy sharp, we pass a vent emitting steamy volcanic gas. The gas swirls around the landscape creating an atmosphere reminiscent of a science-fiction movie.

Climbing a series of steep sandy ridges, we make our final ascent to the rim of the crater. A pulsating rumble grows louder as we move through mist, contouring around a steep slope and criss-crossing eroded gullies. Through the mist, we see John's silhouette next to a stick marking the edge of the crater. Words cannot adequately describe the view. Peering down into the guts of the Earth we silently stare at the violent, boiling lava lake 500 metres below. The crater is monstrous and resembles an open cut mine of epic proportions. Volcanic gas and steam swirls about, pulsating in time with a rumbling crescendo of noise. As the rumbling sound peaks, lava is hurled upwards and can be seen slowly dripping down the lower crater walls, rapidly changing from hot red to black as it cools.

The following day we make a side trip to the crater of Benbow, ascending a long,

## OTHER PACIFIC ISLAND ADVENTURES

- The 14-kilometre Queiros Trek officially opened on Vanuatu's Espiritu Santo island last year, 406 years after the landing of Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Queiros. The route between Matantas and Thayon takes in turtle breeding areas, caves and World War II relics. [espiritusantotourism.com](http://espiritusantotourism.com)
- New Caledonia's Grand Randonnee traverses 120 kilometres of red terrain between the town of Prony and Dumbéa Dam in the Great South region. Authorities plan to extend the trail to the most northerly point of the principal island. [visitnewcaledonia.com](http://visitnewcaledonia.com)
- Friendly Islands Kayak Company offers a nine-day kayaking tour of the Ha'apai Islands among Tonga's turtles and humpback whales between July and December. [fikco.com](http://fikco.com)
- Off Road Fiji has launched a new tour of Naihehe Cave, which is the island nation's largest system at 170 metres long and contains remnants of the oven and priest chamber used in cannibalistic rituals. The half-day tour, which was launched by Australian expat Jay Whyte as an extension of the popular Sigatoka River Safari, costs around \$145. [offroadfiji.com/safaris](http://offroadfiji.com/safaris)
- A new booking website bringing together bungalow accommodation and adventure tours on Ambrym Island has launched. [ambrym.travel](http://ambrym.travel)
- Vila-based Vanuatu Ecotours offers around 40 bushwalking, mountain biking and kayaking itineraries across the archipelago, including a half-day river kayaking tour starting at AU\$68. [vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu](http://vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu)



Canoe under construction

exposed ridge to the highest point at 1,090 metres. We enjoy dramatic views of the ash plain, the neighbouring island of Paama and the symmetrical active cone of Lopevi, which rises 1,413 metres out of the sea to Vanuatu's highest point.

John carries a 100-metre rope that he plans to anchor at the rim and use as a handline to climb down to the lower ledge close to the lava lake. A hair-raising prospect, but the descent is much easier than it looks and facilitates a close view of another fireworks display. Looking back at the slope before commencing the climb I'm reminded of glacial moraines in Tibet.

Our final night on the volcano is spectacular; clear sky, no wind, full moon. We brew a billy tea and relax, hypnotised by the red glow of the craters reflected off smoke plumes.

I awake early the next day to a dramatically different scene; the clear weather has turned thick fog and drizzle. Leaving the sheltered camp we begin a walk across the plain in visibility ranging from 20 to just five metres. The craters that were so clearly visible last night are nowhere to be seen, but John leads us intuitively through the eerie mist. With the wind howling and horizontal rain pounding our faces, we gaze into the fog and steam-filled crater hoping for another glimpse of the lava, but it never comes.

After contouring around the edge of the

crater we quickly descend another steep, sandy ridge into vastly different vegetation from that found on the western slopes. Wild cane grass covers the northern flanks of the volcano, resembling savannah grassland. We scramble down more dry creekbeds and follow a dry, flat and open watercourse.

When we reach a track junction marked by a pile of cut cane grass, we descend a ridgeline amid huge rainforest trees, cycads, ferns, lilies and epiphytic orchids. When walking from the north it is customary to throw a cutting of cane grass

on the sand to alert the spirits of the volcano to your presence and allow for safe passage.

After a long day of walking we finally arrive at Ranon on the tranquil north coast, and travel by boat to the grass airstrip on the western side of Ambrym to leave Vanuatu and its rich wilderness behind, with no small amount of regret. **W**

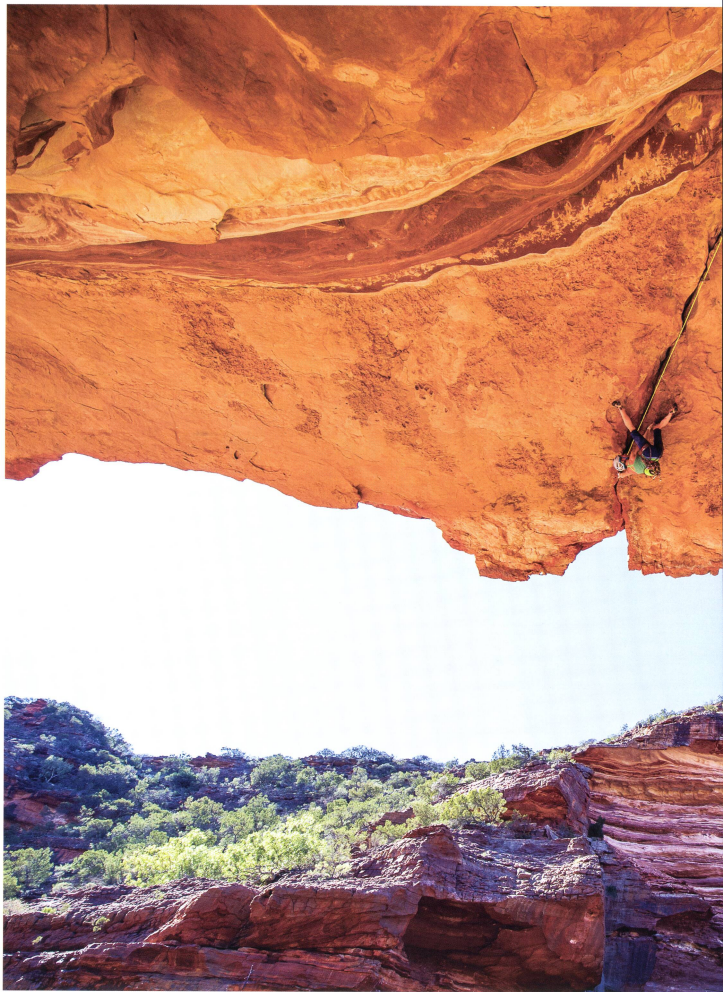
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Ed Hill is a conservation campaigner and bushwalking guide based in Tasmania who has lived and worked with remote communities in Vanuatu as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development.

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Malvakal Bay, Malekula Island







# GRAVITY DEFYING

Midway through shooting for a new coffee table book on Australian climbing, *Simon Carter* reveals some of his favourite spots

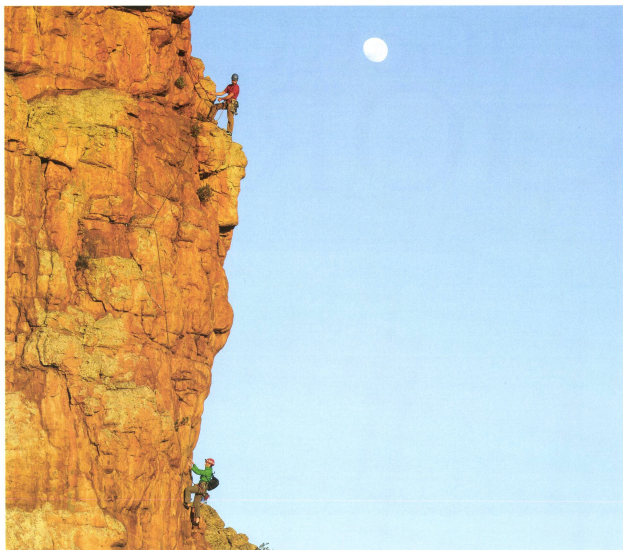
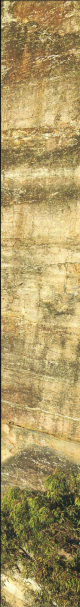




Previous page: Monique Forestier attempts the Kalbarri Gold (26) roof crack in WA's Kalbarri Gorge. Clockwise from left: John Smoothy starts early on Checkpoint Charlie (21) in the Blue Mountains, NSW; Andrew Trotter and Sarah Osborne on the classic multi-pitch Checkmate (17), Mount Arapiles, VIC; Garry Phillips on pitch three of the hardcore Live the Life route at Lake Huntley, Tyndall Range, TAS; John J. O'Brien on Black Leather Dungarees (26), Mount Coolum, QLD.



Canberra-born Simon Carter has spent the past two decades travelling the world's top climbing destinations, from Tsaranoro in Madagascar to China's Mount Huashan, but can normally be found hanging from a rock in the Blue Mountains. [onsight.com.au](http://onsight.com.au)



# Gorgeous GORGES

Meg McKone spends nine days stomping and swimming across the hot, maze-like, critter-filled Cockburn Range at the top of Western Australia

Any bushwalker who has travelled the Gibb River Road between Kununurra and the Pentecost River in the Kimberley could not fail to be impressed by the imposing presence of the Cockburn Range. Along its 22-kilometre southern edge, a steepening slope sweeps 400 metres upwards to an almost unbroken cliffline. The view from across the Pentecost River is even more spectacular as numerous headlands topped by second and third clifflines reach like fingers towards the river flats below. What is not obvious from the plains, however, is that the range is made up of two substantial plateaus, the north and south separated by a high saddle and riven with narrow gorges.

The cliffs, which completely surround both plateaus, present an obvious challenge to walkers. From each plateau a substantial watercourse—and obvious access route—flows northwards, Slaty Creek from the North Cockburns and an unnamed creek from the South Cockburns. There are occasional breaks in the cliffs, and some short, steep creeks that don't reveal their weak points until seen close up. It's worth poring over Google Earth before you go because the 1:50,000 topographic maps

are not completely accurate in their depiction of the cliffline.

The aim of our nine-day walk is to traverse both plateaus using Slaty Creek to access the top of the North Cockburns, crossing to the South Cockburns by untried passes, then finishing near Emma Gorge on the Gibb River Road.

We set off through the grassy woodland near Diggers Rest Station, part of the privately owned El Questro Wilderness Park, after lunch on a day when the mercury reaches 37°C in Kununurra. It's only seven kilometres to camp and the bright sunlight illuminates the cliff edges along the North Cockburns in a most beguiling way, but frequent drink stops in the meagre patches of shade mean it's near sunset (around 5pm in late autumn) before we reach a large pool and enough open ground to stop for the night.

A rustling in the bushes reveals the presence of dozens of cane toads, though they don't seem to have diminished the legions of centimetre-long brown frogs that leap carelessly about, one to its doom in the fire. A tent inner is essential here because as well as being home to frogs, toads and snakes, thousands of insects appear at night to check out your torch.

The next morning we quickly reach the start of the Slaty Creek Gorge, which is lined with impressive cliffs for about five kilometres. We decide to climb around the first pools instead of swimming them, which proves the right choice when we spot a metre-long freshwater crocodile in a large pool. "Is it dead?" I ask the others, before seeing the croc convulse into action when a large fish swims up from below. As the walls close in further we no longer have the option of climbing around, and it's a relief to fall into the water fully clothed and cool off.

Though it's slow going, with lots of rock hopping and sections of large boulders to haul ourselves up and over, there's plenty to admire, including beautiful pink-tinged walls reflected in the pools and patches of rainforest trees giving deep green shade.

By late afternoon we come to a rock platform suitable for camping and, sending one member of the group ahead, ascertain that the top of the gorge lies 20 minutes away, but that's just too far for me. In fact, it takes us nearly an hour to reach the top the following morning via a series of climbs through the cliffs.

The upper level of Slaty Creek, starting above a semicircle of cliff, presents a total





*The western edge of the North Cockburn Range. Right: (L-R) Ian Hickson and Drew Stones at the entrance to the canyon in The Maze. Photos: Meg McKone*



change of scene. It's as if a huge serpent has slithered up a broad valley biting large chunks out of the edges to rim it with vertical red cliffs. We discover the rock platform immediately above the gorge is the only place suitable to camp, the rest of the valley smothered with thick grass and spinifex underlain with loose rocks. Two more levels top the valley: the first a dissected rocky plain covered in a soft species of spinifex and the uppermost clothed in beautiful woodland trees but rocky.

One of the attractions of the Kimberley is its variety of ecosystems, differing from more southerly parts of Australia with brighter-green, broader-leaved eucalypts and the reddening leaves of deciduous trees. Prominent too are unique species such as the magnificent baobabs with distinctive bottle trunks, spreading branches and large rounded fruits.

Leaving our packs in what shade we can find, we head up to the top plateau for the views, which include the formidable cliffs of the South Cockburns. As the weather grows hotter and hotter, we revise our plans to check out two prominent headlands.

The western rim of the range drops

away in a magnificent double cliffline as if sliced through with a hot knife, while on the plains beyond, the broad, silvery Pentecost and Durack rivers mingle on the plains in the smoky distance—it being burning-off season.

We make our way back down to Slatey Creek by dusk, with a further seven kilometres to go through tall grass and Spinifex booby-trapped with rocky

The true right side looks like a goer, but leads to an even longer drop. Halfway back up, we sidle between the two main clifflines until the lads get out the rope to attempt a descent of a near-vertical gully bristling with loose rocks and nothing but the brittle trunks of spindly trees to belay on.

After a few pithy words to my companions, I retreat uphill to the partial shade of a shallow gully. When the others

### **Cane toads don't seem to have diminished the legions of centimetre-long brown frogs that leap carelessly about, one to its doom in the fire.**

surprises before making camp. Luckily we find some pools from which to top up our water and I'm grateful for a dip in the shallow water while looking up at the stars.

I'm shaken awake at 4.30am, half an hour before first light, to start the easy climb out of the valley and cross four kilometres of fairly flat ground. The creek we hope to descend is composed of flat rock platforms, the type that form high vertical cliffs. Standing on the edge of the first, I wonder how we can possibly reach the two tantalising green pools far below.

start calling for me to come down, the echoes make their instructions incomprehensible. They have followed a kangaroo pad that "must go somewhere", including through the path of a very large snake. I rejoin the group for a few hundred metres of sidling until we reach a precipitous slope leading down to the creekbed.

Upstream lies an amphitheatre-like pool; a magnificent place to lunch and swim while listening to the clear, melodic song of a butcherbird. Downstream, we find



enough flattish rock ledges overhung by rainforest trees to pitch our three tents.

It takes over four hours to cover the six kilometres to Cockburn Creek, which separates the two halves of the range. Surrounded by rainforest and tropical melaleucas, with their papery trunks blasted by wet season floods, I watch the morning sun redden the cliffs above us to the sound of the strong-flowing creek. I notice an Aboriginal scar in the lower trunk of one of the melaleucas where a thick layer of bark was removed and regret feeling too hot to look for some of the area's indigenous rock art.

discussed earlier. I've plenty of food and could walk out to Diggers Rest if worst comes to worst. Bearings suggest I'm only several hundred metres from the knoll, but fortunately I hear the others calling from behind before I have to make a decision. I must have passed them in another channel.

The water in Cockburn Creek is milky but fine to drink and cool enough for a refreshing wallow. We find a lovely campsite on a shingle bank and while away the afternoon snoozing, swimming and reading, then watch the setting sun turn the cliffs of the South Cockburns

clusters and dodgeable groves of pandanus. Pandanus leaves have vicious backward-curving barbs that are best avoided.

The cliffs close in and increase in height as we pass beautiful lagoons with tall paperbarks reflected in their calm waters. We lunch beside one idyllic lagoon, before enduring the afternoon from hell as the humidity rises, the grass thickens and grows higher, the rocks become sharper and the flood debris more difficult to negotiate. After some painfully-slow going, we reach a magnificent amphitheatre absolutely pooped and find a clear, shady terrace on which to spend the night.

The next day brings more of the same but in even hotter temperatures, despite light rain overnight. We take two long swims, getting our legs tangled in weeds the second time, but eventually reach Bat Cave Gorge. Round a sharp corner, the gorge becomes extremely dark and malodorous. I baulk at the smelly, oily water but the bravest of us, Ian, happily plops in and swims into the cave beyond, sending hundreds of bats flapping out into the daylight.

When I get round to unpacking my suspiciously heavy pack I find that my double layer of garbage bags has sprung a leak and my down sleeping bag is

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**Round a sharp corner, the gorge becomes extremely dark and malodorous. I baulk at the smelly, oily water but the bravest of us happily plops in and swims into the cave beyond.**

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As we leave the gorge the high grass, broad spurs and multiple dry creek channels make it hard to keep in contact with each other. Until now, the others have been waiting for me at strategic intervals, but now I'm alone and no one is answering my cooes. I know that if necessary, I can walk on to Cockburn Creek and wait near a small knoll we

blood red. We also spend some time removing large black ticks with yellow splodges on their backs.

Farewelling the North Cockburns, the next day starts with a four-kilometre walk around the north-west headland and into the valley of The Maze Creek. Then we enjoy an hour of walking bliss on real soil and short grass interspersed with baobab



*A protefouon-fined lagoon in the creek draining The Maze, South Cockburns*



Drew Stones navigates a Cockburns rockfall.

wringing wet. Fortunately, it only takes a few hours on hot rocks in the full sun to dry out. Note to self: bring decent dry bags on next Kimberley trip. It rains more substantially that night, heralding a welcome change to cooler weather ahead of a particularly energetic day.

A kilometre upstream we turn into a gorge to the south-east. On a previous trip in 1995 I dubbed this Leaping Frog Creek, but there are no small brown amphibians this time and I hope that's not down to the cane toads. A kilometre further on, the creek is slashed across at 90 degrees by another gorge, then continues up a substantial rock-step over a large boulder field and into a high, narrow canyon—one of the highlights of this area of intersecting gorges, which is appropriately referred to as 'The Maze'. A key handhold on the entrance to the canyon is too high for me to reach, but a big shove from Ian gets me up there. I feel my way along the dark, narrow slot, through some pools, and emerge at a cliff.

Returning to the packs we left below the boulder field, we manage to find a route through the cliffs to the north-east that brings us to a plateau above the canyon. Two kilometres further on we drop into Upper Leaping Frog Creek, which lives up to its name with so many of critters jumping around at dusk that it's difficult to avoid treading on them. Three of the most enthusiastic jumpers meet a tragic end in a bill of boiling water. The flat rock with views of the undulating green plateau makes for an ideal campsite, as long as you avoid the leeches at one end of the swimming pool.

The next day we head across the tops for the upper section of Emma Gorge, above the unclimbable waterfall near the

El Questro resort. Unable to camp beside the pools due to the thick undergrowth, we collect six litres of water each so that we can rest close to our descent route

from the range. Happily, the cooler weather makes it easy to haul heavy packs back on to the tops and a little judicious rock clearing leaves us with a reasonable campsite for our final night, except for Ian that is, who can't resist a tick-infested grassy patch.

The descent through the cliffline from a point to the east of Emma Gorge presents no difficulties. While a cabin generator hums below, the cliffs of the South Cockburn plateau rim stretch serenely off into the distance. The tourists at the resort are no doubt enjoying their luxury wilderness experience. We have enjoyed a rarer kind of luxury, one with an immediacy and intensity that for nine days has totally engaged us; the luxury of finding our own way through these remarkable ranges. [W](http://www.elquestro.com.au)

You must obtain permission to walk in El Questro and fees apply.  
[elquestro.com.au](http://elquestro.com.au)





*Rod in one of several dead-end canyons*  
Photos by Tim Leane, Carl Johnston and Rodney Angelo



# BLACKWATER to BLACKHEATH

A north-south traverse of Wollemi National Park  
throws up a number of challenges for *Tim Leane*

Memories seem to have a knack of rose-tinting the worst scrub bash into a beautiful and scenic stroll in a park. In December 2007, three friends and I had just finished crossing the lower Wollemi from west to east. After about 45 kilometres and four days of relentless scrubby forest, almost featureless ridges (at least in terms of navigation points), and a dodgy descent over a cliff into Colo River gorge, the consensus was 'never again' will we venture into the scrubby ridges of the Wollemi.

Skipping forward to a sunny day in September and myself, Carl Johnston and Rodney Angelo have just been deposited on Blackwater Creek on the northern edge of Wollemi National Park. Twenty-three days of dehydrated food and a 150-odd kilometres of canyon country lay between us and our proposed finishing point in Blackheath.

The first few days of walking take us through some fairly easy river-flat eucalypt forest, though not without scrubby sections and frigid creek crossings that Carl equates to "a migraine in the ankle".

We face our first crossing of a major valley on the third day. I'd heard some scathing rumours about the quality of topographic maps in the northern Wollemi, but brushed them aside. We soon realise, however, that a few cliff lines on a map indicate 20-metre-plus cliffs in almost every direction. In fact, 'implied cliff' seems the best way to reference the scarce markings on paper.

In the planning process of a long trackless walk, one has to try to estimate as accurately as possible what the likely progress may be, and then build in some elasticity for the unexpected. When I think about the fact that we're only four days in and have covered just two horizontal kilometres in four hours, my mood turns from one of excitement to fear that we've grossly underestimated the terrain. After four more hours of searching for passes, several pack hauls over the edge of two tiers of cliffs, we arrive at the base of a narrow canyon on dusk and set up camp surrounded by mossy sandstone walls and leafy ferns.

The next day starts with a few hundred metres of walking through an unnamed canyon followed by the ascent out of the valley, with yet more 'implied cliffs'. The view from the top





L-R Tim Leane, Carl Johnston, Rodney Angelo at Blackwater Creek

offers relief in the form of a long stretch of ridgeline covered with our favourite plant in old man banksia. Maybe this will be possible after all.

Conventionally the Wollemi pine is the botanical holy grail in this region, but in terms of actually getting somewhere the humble banksia is what you look for. Typically it grows among Sydney peppermints in open woodland on ridges with minimal understorey and sandstone outcropping; perfect for easy walking. Conversely, the sight of grey gums indicates fertile shale soil with resultant thick, spiky scrub. And once you start seeing ironbarks, which prefer even more shale soil, you're best off finding a different route.

Bushwalking lends itself to tradition, which for Carl means at least one unceremonious encounter with a tiger snake (as readers of Wild issue 114 will know). I'm less than surprised therefore, after our second day of ridge walking, to watch a coiled and reared 1.3-metre tiger snake slip by Carl's ankle and then beneath my dropped pack. During the ensuing debate about whether to trap and isolate the snake in a drybag overnight, I spy it darting away and, with some encouragement, chase it an extra 20 metres away from camp.

Our least favourite foliage makes an appearance the following day: ironbark, blackthorn and coral pea vine. Struggling through the spiky, near-impenetrable understorey of this patch of shale sandstone transition forest, our morning walk soon slows from a pace of a couple of kilometres per hour to a couple of hours per kilometre. Every metre gained is another 20 thorns to

pick out from our thighs. Morale plummets and 'what ifs' start to circulate about the rest of the ridge to Ovens Creek.

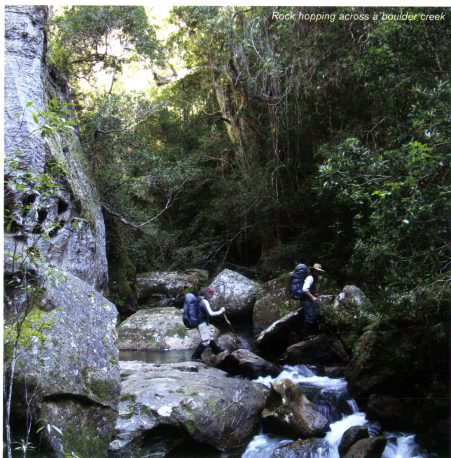
Fortunately the rough patch turns out to be only a few hundred metres and we're through in half an hour. Having survived unmarked cliffs, tiger snakes and ironbarks, we opt for a rest day in Ovens Creek.

The decision to allocate every fourth day to resting allows us some contingency for the unexpected, including much-needed gear repairs. This downtime also takes the expedition edge off what is a beautiful walk.

From Ovens Creek we set off for the enigmatic Gaspers Mountain, a cleared fertile basalt cap in a sea of sandstone wilderness, somehow frozen in time. We find a food drop with use-by dates around the year 2000, which tops up our ailing sugar supply, as well as some overgrown cattle yards, about 25 free-roaming steers, an old tractor and a weather station in various states of disrepair. The only sign of recent human visitation is a chainsawed log on the fire trail access to the mountain.

The warm, dry conditions mean that surface water is receding rapidly down minor creek lines, so we decide to leave the dry ridges for a spell in the rainforested creeks. I'd take a punt that the Wollemi contains the highest density of cliffs anywhere in Australia. In many places, to try and walk a kilometre in a straight line involves crossing multiple cliff-lined creeks. As such, the general rule for the Wollemi is that ridgelines and creeks are generally traversable; it's when cutting between the two that you can come unstuck.

Some complacent navigation and a bit of following our noses rather than a compass



Rock hopping across a boulder creek

bearing, promptly has us staring down a 50-metre cliff (one that's even mapped) into the creek line we had hoped to cross at a more accessible point. But with some traversing around to a section of lower cliffs, and more hand-over-hand abseiling with our trusty eight-millimetre rope, we drop into a gorgeous section of canyon. Our moods lift as we hit the deep shade.

The next morning fails to provide any viable exit routes up to our next ridge, but eventually we find a side gully with some waterfalls to scramble up. This then grows into a cavernous canyon housing 30-metre sassafras and coachwood trees. It's the sort of lost world habitat where you'd expect to see the Wollemi pine, or even a pterodactyl. Unfortunately for us the canyon walls continue to narrow and the creek takes a rapid step up in the form of a seven-metre, unscramblable waterfall. There is no other choice but to work our way backwards down the canyon looking out for any possible passes.

Having gingerly scaled some flaky honeycomb sandstone out of the canyon, we emerge three hours later on the ridge above among red bloodwoods and angophoras. After crossing over another range, we drop into a mini amphitheatre with overhanging sandstone walls; a truly surreal campsite to come across that somehow makes our

evening cup of tea taste sweeter than ever before. The resident glowworms form a sparkling, 360-degree view, making it hard to tell where they stop and the stars begin.

Almost two weeks into the trip, our load of 600 grams of food per person per day has dwindled and the packs are a comfortable weight, but the fate of our food drop on the Colo River could affect the comfort level significantly. Thankfully, when we reach the drybags suspended from trees with builder's string they have resisted tampering from any wily bush creatures, including a lurking lace monitor. As glad as we are to find our

rendered all of our jackets less than waterproof. The fine weather well and truly turned, we're battered by gusting winds and driving rain. A cave seems the logical destination, but the weather has already affected our faculties. I decide the adapted philosophy that 'a bird (cave) in the hand is worth two in the bush' is most logical, but Carl suggests 'the bird (cave) in the bush is twice as good as the bird in the hand'. Rod simply observes: "I'm too cold and wet for bird analogies."

After several hours of slipping and sliding up and down gullies, we manage to find a

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**I'd take a punt that the Wollemi contains the highest density of cliffs anywhere in Australia. In many places, to try and walk a kilometre in a straight line involves crossing multiple cliff-lined creeks.**

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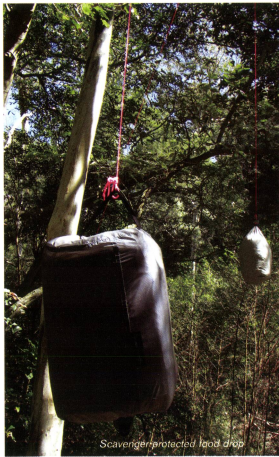
sustenance for the next half of the walk intact, however, the seven-kilogram addition to the pack is less than welcome.

Team dynamics on a long bushwalk are easily as important as gear or fitness levels, and the three of us seem to be a pretty workable combination so far. Then it starts to spit. We quickly discover that the wear and tear of previous scrub-bashing trips has

spacious cave with a flattish area for sleeping and ample room to dry out saturated gear.

Climbing out the next morning we enter into a part of the landscape where thickly forested main ridgelines and minor spurs are of the same height and morph indistinguishably into each other. Crossing over Limit Hill, our current north-south route bisects our west-east one from four years earlier. Then, when

*Easy walking along banksia ridgetop*



*Scavenger-protected food drop*

Having barely seen another person for the last three weeks, he takes off running down the track in T-shirt, undies and boots.



our easterly running ridge rudely decided to turn south and disappear down an escarpment, we reoriented ourselves with a GPS that broke after one reading. Today, in the same misty weather, in almost the same

grid square, we have once again lost the main ridge. Pulling out the GPS, well rested since Blackwater Creek, I see we have wandered our way on to a southerly spur.

The upshot of the rain is some easy ridge

walking and water practically on tap from the pools in the sandstone pavement.

Having come to embrace the trial-and-error approach to route finding, we make for a hopeful-looking spur that turns out to be a workable route into an impressively inaccessible and wild Nayook Creek.

Without knowing what each creek, gully or ridge might hold, there's always an expectation of the worst coupled with a tentative hope for the best. This time, our hopes are fulfilled with a successful descent and easy amble along the river, followed by a lunch of Jatz crackers with cheese and salami while watching a pied cormorant diving for yabbies.

The logical ridgeline to walk from the Wollangambe River to the Grose Valley would have been through Mount Irvine and Mount Wilson and on to Bells Line of Road. But not wanting to finish our walk with 30 kilometres of bitumen walking, we take an alternative route that involves crossing the Wollangambe three times and a jaunt into the plateau country of Lost Flat Mountain.

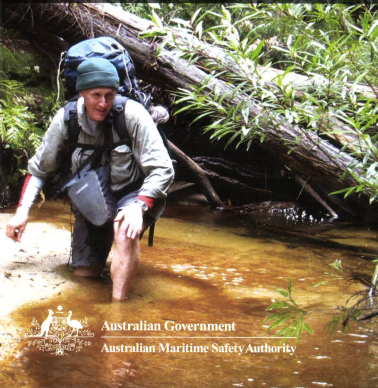
Here we have two surprise successes; our fastest pace of 17-minute kilometres, thanks to our friends the old man banksia and scribbly gum, and a shortcut that actually works. We manage to shave about five

# Be safe, Be sure.

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- Distress beacons should only be used in life-threatening situations
- In the event of an emergency, you should first signal other people in your area using radios or other methods of attracting attention
- Mobile phones can be used but don't rely on them, they may be out of range, have limited battery power, or become water-damaged
- Leave trek details with family and friends. You can also log trek details through your online beacon registration account for AMSA to use in the event of a beacon activation.



Australian Government  
Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Beacon registration is free  
**[www.amsa.gov.au/beacons](http://www.amsa.gov.au/beacons)**  
phone 1800 406 406



kilometres off a walk around headwaters by cutting through a creek gully and dare to wonder if, after three weeks, we have begun to understand this country.

With a shortcut under our belt, we cross our fingers and head for another hopeful spur down into the Wollangambe River for the last time. A few hundred metres of scrambling and sliding down the spur and we land on what looks to me like a beautiful campsite of white sandy beach about half a foot above a gently flowing, crystal-clear river. With thunderstorms predicted, however, Carl and Rod veto my suggestion to camp in the gorge and we instead settle into a dingy cave on the opposite side.

A quick pace the next day through Mount Wilson and along Bells Line of Road and Pierces Pass bring us to the upper reaches of the Grose Valley. A few kilometres from the Acacia Flat campground it begins to spit with rain and Rod decides that his shredded, leave-nothing-to-the-imagination trousers and poor excuse for a rain jacket might as well be discarded. So, having barely seen another person for the last three weeks, he takes off running down the track in T-shirt, undies and boots. Of course, it happens to be a public holiday weekend and we are forced to deny all knowledge of the half-naked

bushman when Sydneysiders on the home stretch ask if we're missing a teammate.

Our last night before climbing up Govetts Leap to Blackheath pub is spent among blue gums with several other bushwalking parties, made up of people in their 20s and 30s. And yet, when preparing for this trip we had gleaned almost all of our off-track information from people who had been exploring the Wollemi since the 1970s. It leaves me hoping that the tradition of losing

yourself—in a non-geographical sense—in magical places like the Wollemi will continue down the generations. **W**

**MAPS:** The Land and Property Management Authority publishes 1:25,000 maps for Widdien, Mount Pomany, Coricudgy, Coorongooba, Gaspers Mountain, Mount Morgan, Rock Hill, Wollangambe, Mount Wilson, Mount Lagoon, Six Brothers, Colo Heights and Katoomba. [lpi.nsw.gov.au](http://lpi.nsw.gov.au)

Warm temperate rainforest surrounding the first canyon campsite



## Willis's Walkabouts

### Vanuatu

**You have to experience it to believe it.**

The story by Ed Hill & Grant Dixon in this edition is based on one of our first Vanuatu trips. Our trips combine spectacularly beautiful scenery and reasonably challenging bush walking, with an unforgettable cultural experience visiting many traditional villages in the highlands of Malekula Island, the most culturally and linguistically diverse island in Vanuatu.

We can't put it all in an ad this size. For more information, please contact us or have a look at the Vanuatu trip notes on our website.

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For further information: [vicmap.info@depi.vic.gov.au](mailto:vicmap.info@depi.vic.gov.au)


**Authoritative | Current | Statewide**




# The Adventure BUCKET LIST


To help you make the most of 2014, *Wild* rounds up some of the iconic, hardcore and quirky quests to tick off your life list


NSW

 **EXPLORE CLAUSTRAL CANYON:** Scramble, wade, swim, jump and abseil your way through the magical, moss-covered passages of this technical canyon, including the famous Black Hole of Calcutta descent. Blue Mountains Adventure Company ([bmac.com.au](http://bmac.com.au)) offers guided descents as well as a three-day course for those wanting to hone their rope skills.

 **STAND ATOP MOUNT GOWER:** Regularly cited as one of the world's best day walks, you might scoff at the fixed ropes and licensed guide requirement on this rugged 875-metre climb but the plunging cliffs, Tolkienesque moss forest and view across to the world's tallest sea stack have the ability to stun hardened bushwalkers. Friendly providence petrels are also known to swoop in on summiteers between November and May. [lordhoweisland.info](http://lordhoweisland.info)


 **VISIT THE MUNGO LADY:** While the 42,000-year-old remains of Mungo Lady—which are some of the world's oldest—are preserved in a safe in Lake Mungo National Park, the Mars-like surface of the ancient lake and the petrified footprints found further north make for one of Australia's least appreciated but most fascinating landscapes. [visitmungo.com.au](http://visitmungo.com.au)


 **FIND A FLEAY'S BARRIED FROG:** Listen out for the "arrrrrk" of the endangered, pale brown Fleay's barred frog at Protectors Falls in Nightcap National Park over summer. Deeper in the park's Gondwana rainforest, keep your eye out for other threatened species such as the regent bowerbird and red goshawk, as well as the nightcap oak only discovered in 2012. [nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)

 **CONQUER THE K2K:** Break in your snowshoes and skis on this classic 70-kilometre backcountry adventure between Kiandra and our highest peak, checking in at Broken Dam, Happys, O'Keefes and Mawsons huts. [khuts.org](http://khuts.org)


VIC


 **ABSEIL THE NORTH WALL:** There are few better ways to test your mettle than with a 300-metre multi-pitch abseil into The Gorge, followed by a scramble up a sheer gully to get out, among the granite tors and tumbling waterfalls of Mount Buffalo National Park. Adventure Guides Australia is on hand for beginners or those wanting to get their instructor qualification. [adventureguidesaustralia.com.au](http://adventureguidesaustralia.com.au)

 **WALK THE AAWT:** Not easily ticked off but fun to plan nonetheless, the 650-kilometre Australian Alps Walking Track is the toughest and grandest of our long-distance trails with an elevation change equivalent to three Everest ascents, a number of river crossings, variable weather and minimal markers. [australionalps.environment.gov.au](http://australionalps.environment.gov.au)

 **HELP SAVE THE TIGER QUOLL:** Spend a weekend helping to retrieve camera traps, collect DNA samples, survey vegetation and replant the habitat of endangered tiger quolls in the Otways. The spotted-tailed marsupial was thought to have become locally extinct before scats were found in 2012. [conservationecologycentre.org](http://conservationecologycentre.org)

 **BECOME A BETTER BOULDERER:** The wealth of bouldering opportunities around Mount Stapylton in Grampians National Park means there's a sandstone-shaped problem for all abilities, including one of the world's hardest and longest in Wheel of Life. [parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://parkweb.vic.gov.au)

 **CRAWL THROUGH LABERTOUCHE CAVE:** Around 100 kilometres south-east of Melbourne, it's easy to take this granite boulder infill cave for granted but its mixture of abseils, climbs and tight squeezes makes it an ideal introduction to Victoria's underground world. [caving.org.au](http://caving.org.au)

 **RACE ON THE MURRAY:** What better excuse for paddling the mighty Murray River than to raise money for charity as a competitor in one of the world's longest canoe races? The five-day YMCA Murray Marathon sees around 750 people paddle into Swan Hill from Yarrawonga at the end of each year. [murraymarathon.ymca.org.au](http://murraymarathon.ymca.org.au)



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☐ **TAKE A SURVIVAL COURSE:** Ensure you can be self-reliant in the bush by learning about medicinal plants, celestial navigation, tracking, foraging, water procurement and how to build a shelter. Iconic survivalist Bob Cooper leads advanced courses in the Pilbara. [bobcoopersurvival.com](http://bobcoopersurvival.com)

☐ **BE WOWED BY MITCHELL FALLS:** As the Kimberley's most photographed attraction, the four-tiered Mitchell Falls is perhaps best appreciated from the air but can also be thoroughly enjoyed as part of a week-long, Aboriginal art-spotting walk starting at Donkins Falls. [bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://bushwalkingholidays.com.au)

☐ **VISIT THE WORLD'S LARGEST MONOCLINE:** More than twice the size of Uluru and around a billion years old, Mount Augustus (or Burringurrah) may be a fair drive away but the six-kilometre climb gives you a rather unique perspective over the surrounding red plains. [dec.wa.gov.au](http://dec.wa.gov.au)

☐ **HELP PROTECT THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FISH:** Swimming with whale sharks on Ningaloo Marine Park is on many people's bucket list but you can go one better and contribute to their protection by taking photographs for the Wildlifebook database. [whaleshark.org](http://whaleshark.org)

☐ **BECOME A MACRO PRO:** Walking the jarrah forests of the Bibb Track in wildflower season is surely the best way to practise your macro photography, with introductory classes available at Kings Park in Perth and guided wildflower walks available through the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track. [bgpa.wa.gov.au](http://bgpa.wa.gov.au), [bibbulmuntrack.org.au](http://bibbulmuntrack.org.au)

☐ **CLEANSW YOURSELF:** While exploring the serpentine tunnels, sheer gorges and sparkling rock pools of Karijini National Park, take time out for a soak in the photogenic pool in Hammersley Gorge. [karijini.com](http://karijini.com)

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☐ **FLY OVER THE PAINTED HILLS:** With no roads or tracks open to the public, the only way to see these protected 500-million-year-old red, yellow and white mounds on Anna Creek Station is from the air. You can take in the moonscape of Lake Eyre on the same trip. [wrightsair.com.au](http://wrightsair.com.au)

☐ **INDULGE A FRESHWATER FANTASY:** Earn your stripes with the Cave Divers Association of Australia in the famously clear water of the Limestone Coast, working up from The Chasm of Piccaninnie Ponds to Tank Cave, Australia's longest submerged system. [cavedivers.com.au](http://cavedivers.com.au)

☐ **REFOCUS IN THE FLINDERS RANGES:** Join a bush camping trip from Iga Warta village to see the plants, rock art and history of the Gammon Ranges through the eyes of the Adnyamathanha people. [igawarta.com](http://igawarta.com)

☐ **SPEND SOME TIME ON THE HEYSEN:** If you can't take a couple of months out to through-hike the mountain backbone of South Australia, get a taste of the 1,200-kilometre trail by taking part in the Warren Bonython Memorial Walk or Heysen 105 Trail Race. [heysentrail.asn.au](http://heysentrail.asn.au), [sarrc.asn.au](http://sarrc.asn.au)

☐ **LEARN TO SANDBOARD ON KANGAROO ISLAND:** The Little Sahara, formed over thousands of years from eroded limestone, is an easy place to sample sandboarding with the family. Boards can be hired from Kangaroo Island Outdoor Action. [kioutdooraction.com.au](http://kioutdooraction.com.au)

☐ **CAMEL TREK THE OODNADATTA TRACK:** Load up your camels this winter and spend a week exploring the sand dunes, mesas and gibber plains near Coward Springs. [cowardsprings.com.au](http://cowardsprings.com.au)



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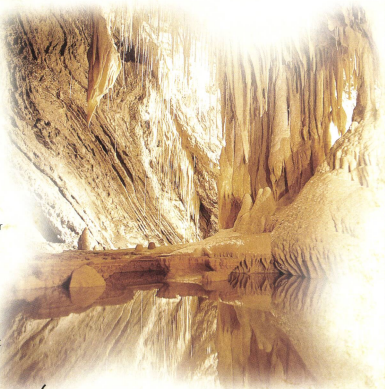
**KAYAK THE KATHERINE:** After a jaunt on the Jabula Trail leave Nitmiluk National Park behind and wend your way through the wildlife-rich paperbark forests, small rapids and pandanus channels below Katherine Gorge. Gecko Canoeing runs a six-day tour on the Katherine and Daly Rivers. [geckocanoeing.com.au](http://geckocanoeing.com.au)

**CHECK OUT THE KINGS CANYON:** Drive an hour north-east of Uluru to appreciate the equally spectacular Kings Canyon on the six-kilometre walk around its rim. Peer 150 metres down to the striped domes and 400-year-old cycads of the Garden of Eden oasis, looking out for spinifex pigeons and white-plumed honeyeaters. [parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au](http://parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au)

**BIRDWATCH IN THE WETLANDS:** The lily-covered billabongs of the Mary River Wetlands—one of the rarest land systems in the world—attract black falcons, rose-crowned fruit doves, collared kingfishers, black-tailed tree-creepers and many more. [ntbirdspecialists.com.au](http://ntbirdspecialists.com.au)

**TAKE A SELFIE AT COUNTS POINT:** Whether you're polishing off the 223-kilometre Larapinta Trail or just squeezing in section 8, there can be fewer better Facebook profile photos than you set against the signature scene of the iconic walk. [australianoutbackmarathon.com](http://australianoutbackmarathon.com)

**RUN THE OUTBACK MARATHON:** Marathons in cities are for wimps. For a real sense of achievement, and a unique view of Kata Tjuta and Uluru, tackle 42 kilometres in the Red Centre with 300 other runners in July. [australianoutbackmarathon.com](http://australianoutbackmarathon.com)



tas

**FIGHT FOR THE ORANGE BELLED PARROT:** Spend 10 days camping in the Southwest National Park as a Wildcare volunteer, working to protect the 50 or so remaining orange-bellied parrots. [wildcaretas.org.au](http://wildcaretas.org.au)

**CLIMB THE TOTEM POLE:** If you're not one of the experienced climbers flocking to Tasman National Park from all corners of the globe to climb this iconic four-metre-wide sea stack, there's always the thrill of watching someone else ascend. [parks.tas.gov.au](http://parks.tas.gov.au)

**EARN WESTERN ARTHUR BRAGGING RIGHTS:** Have you bagged all the other big-name walks but been putting off this punishing 70-kilometre trek over awe-inspiring glaciated peaks? Procrastinate no more—February and March are the driest months, in theory.

**RAFT THE FRANKLIN:** One of the most obvious entries on this list, 10 days rafting one of the planet's few pristine rivers with a detour to climb Frenchmans Cap is bound to be life-changing. [franklinrivertasmania.com](http://franklinrivertasmania.com), [franklinriverrafting.com](http://franklinriverrafting.com)

**RECHARGE ON THREE HUMMOCK:** While away a weekend bushwalking and beachcombing among eastern grey kangaroos, Cape Barren geese and mutton birds on this 7400-hectare island off Tassie's north-west. [threehummockisland.com.au](http://threehummockisland.com.au)

**VENTURE INTO THE TARKINE:** Conservationists fear it will not be long before miners move into Australia's largest tract of temperate rainforest for good so get a date soon to walk among its ancient myrtle beech, sassafras and giant fern trees. [tarkinetrails.com.au](http://tarkinetrails.com.au)

**MARVEL AT THE MOLE CREEK CAVES:** Access to the renowned Kubla Khan cave may be tightly controlled but you can still skip the show caves and get a sneak peek at the raw limestone splendour beneath northern Tasmania with Wild Cave Tours or the local caving club. [wildcavetours.com](http://wildcavetours.com), [mole.org.au](http://mole.org.au)





qld

☐ **SUMMIT MOUNT SORROW:** Looming over the meeting point of two world heritage sites—the Daintree and Great Barrier Reef—the Mount Sorrow ridge walk is a short but strenuous climb involving log-hopping and sometimes leeches, plus views to Snapper Island on a clear day.  
[nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/daintree-mount-sorrow](http://nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/daintree-mount-sorrow)

☐ **PEEK AT A PLATYPUS ON BROKEN RIVER:** Before setting out on the Mackay Highlands Great Walk from Eungulla National Park, perch among the she-oaks and watch the surface of the river for signs of the elusive *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*; it's considered the most reliable spot in the country for spotting one. [nprsr.qld.gov.au](http://nprsr.qld.gov.au)

☐ **KAYAK AROUND HINCHINBROOK ISLAND:** The Thorsborne Trail might be one of the country's most pristine multi-day walks but exploring Hinchinbrook and its neighbouring islands by sea kayak is arguably even more tempting. [coralseakayaking.com](http://coralseakayaking.com)

☐ **TRAVERSE THE MIDDLE RIDGE:** Lamington National Park's network of tracks is a dream for day walkers, and birders in particular, while the cross-country trip between Green Mountains and Binna Burra is reserved for an intrepid few.  
[binnaburralodge.com.au](http://binnaburralodge.com.au), [gondwanaguides.com.au](http://gondwanaguides.com.au)

☐ **FRASER ISLAND GREAT WALK:** Passing through rainforest, open woodland, vine forest and kauri pines, this 90-kilometre journey over the world's largest sand island offers long stretches of solitude and serene campsites as well as goannas and dingoes aplenty.  
[nprsr.qld.gov.au/experiences/great-walks](http://nprsr.qld.gov.au/experiences/great-walks)

☐ **SEE THE STEAMERS:** The journey to one of the most dramatic geological features in south-east Queensland is a steep off-track one not ideal for those with a fear of heights, and just one of many challenging walks in the Scenic Rim region. Guided walks are available throughout Main Range National Park. [horizontoguides.com.au](http://horizontoguides.com.au)



plus

Make your way to the Australian Antarctic Territory: The ultimate bucket list item will set you back a five-figure sum but Macquarie Island in eastern Antarctica is there for the taking aboard the Spirit of Enderby research vessel that departs New Zealand. [heritage-expeditions.com.au](http://heritage-expeditions.com.au)

Photos: Claustral Canyon, Blue Mountains Adventure Company; Mt Buffalo, Tourism Vic; Fitzgerald River National Park, Tourism WA; Iga Warta, SATC; Coutts Point, Tourism NT; Marakoopa Cave, Tourism Tasmania; Hinchinbrook Island, Coral Sea Kayaking



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# Beginner's guide to

A little knowledge can go a long way in helping you find, understand and photograph rainbows, explains *Yoav Daniel Bar-Ness*

**W**e are hardwired to appreciate colour, and there are few sights as wondrous as a bright rainbow shimmering across the sky. There are many variations of this atmospheric phenomenon, including the sky-arc, shimmer, halo and sundog, but let's start with the most familiar: the 42-degree arc.

This is the rainbow of myth and legend: a promise after the Great Flood, a bow for Indra the Rain Lord and the narrow pathway to heaven. These are easy to find when the conditions of water vapour and sunlight are correct. Look in the opposite direction of the sun, imagining a line from the star to your eyes and continuing through towards a point below the horizon. A rainbow will be seen above the horizon at a 42-degree angular distance from this anti-solar point. A fainter rainbow may sometimes be seen at 51 degrees, and together these make a double rainbow.

No matter how far the rainclouds, sprinkler, or waterfall, the rainbow will always be in this same relative position; you will never see an arc rainbow to the north in the southern hemisphere.

The biggest rainbows will be seen at sunrise or sunset when the sun is low,

or when you are looking downwards from high above the ground. The temperate latitudes will also generally have more intense rainbow displays than the tropics because the sun spends more time at a low angle. So if you are on the ground at the equator, you will never see a rainbow at midday; the sun is directly overhead and the anti-solar point will be at your feet.

With a bit of foresight and practice, you can up your chances of photographing rainbows. If you see a dark cloud with the sun shining on to it, for example, the conditions are potentially right for a rainbow. If you are hoping to see a rainbow splash into the ocean at the beach in Sydney, you'll find it at sunset. If you'd like to see a rainbow over the Indian Ocean at Perth, it will be in the morning.

Waterfalls are excellent places to study and photograph rainbows on a clear day. If you can find the right position relative to the sun and water, you'll find the rainbow. It's a true delight to come across the elusive colours in such a dependable way.

The moon, with its silver light, can also form rainbows in the same position as a sunlight rainbow, although far fainter to the human eye. These can be captured more effectively in a long exposure shot.

Rainbows can appear in low fog, seawater or in clouds containing ice crystals too. On the abundant coastal trails of Australia, you'll see a rainbow dancing in the waves if you time it right. It helps to be on a small rise above the water or actually in the water between the waves.

There are also stranger varieties of colourful atmospheric phenomena.

If you are above the clouds, on a mountaintop or in an aeroplane, you may look beneath to see the rare Brocken spectre or bow. Named for a mountain in the Hartz Region of Germany, this is a small ring of colours between five and 20 degrees with your shadow appearing in the centre. On a mountain, you will see your own shadow merging with the shadow of the mountaintop, surrounded by a rainbow halo. On a plane, you will see the shadow of the aircraft in the centre. These spectres, so long the prize of the mountaineer, are now surprisingly common for the midday air passenger.

When there are ice



# chasing rainbows

particles high in the sky it's common for a complete ring of colours to appear around the sun or bright moon, though this is rarely noticed. The apparent radius of the halo is 22 degrees, and its colours are muted relative to the arc rainbows. On very rare circumstances, haloes appear at 18 or 20 degrees, and smaller rings of colour can appear around the moon. A corona appears as a much smaller, fuzzy halo, close enough to the moon that it can appear to be a single disk.

There's actually an intriguing link between the orientation of ice crystals in clouds, the presence of these haloes and the global climate. Murray Hamilton, associate physics professor at the University of Adelaide, says: "The puzzle is why some cirrus clouds, which on account of their altitude must be ice, do not form

halos at all. The reflectivity of the clouds, and therefore the amount of heat on the planet, is the result of still-unknown process of cloud formation."

He continues: "This seems to be linked to the life cycle of the clouds, where possibly the ice surface roughness increases with repeated sublimation [solid becoming gas] and deposition [gas becoming solid]." Scientists study how clouds scatter light, and therefore radiation back into space, when compiling climate models.

At sunrise or sunset, parhelia or 'sundogs' may appear as companions to the sun. These bright arcs extend outwards horizontally from the 22-degree halo. Only visible for a short time, sundogs are caused by the vertical alignment of ice crystals in the atmosphere, which refracts light along the horizontal plane.

First described by Aristotle, sundogs have frequently been recorded as little suns in their own right.

There are many more arcing and sometimes colourful atmospheric phenomena that are rarely spotted, including iridescent shimmering clouds, circumscription arcs, circumzenithal arcs, fourth-order rainbows, parhelic circles, Lowitz arcs, supralateral arcs, 46-degree halos, subhelic arcs, tricker arcs, Wegener arcs, tangent arcs, sun pillars, tertiary rainbows, quaternary rainbows, dewbows, reflection bows, cloudbows, fogbows, twinned bow and supernumerary rainbows.

In Australian conditions, however, the vast majority of rainbows you'll spot are the familiar 42-degree anti-solar arc and the 22-degree halo.



## 3 PROMISING SPOTS FOR RAINBOW SEEKERS

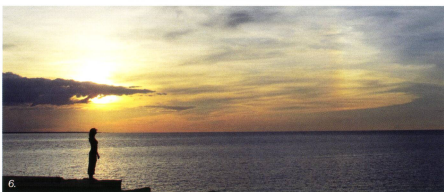
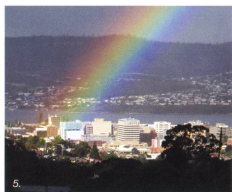
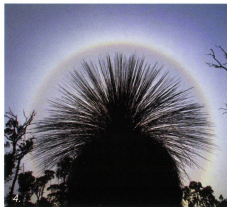
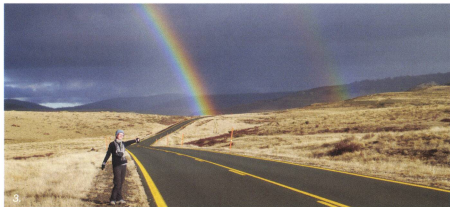
- Albany, WA: A south-facing coastline means you'll see midday rainbows over the Southern Ocean
- Mount Wellington, TAS: You can drive to the summit and see evening rainbows over Hobart to the east
- Blue Mountains, NSW: An abundance of waterfalls and wide, open vistas offers a happy hunting ground for bright colourful arcs

For more about atmospheric optics:



[atoptics.co.uk](http://atoptics.co.uk)  
[weatherscapes.com](http://weatherscapes.com)  
[meteoros.de/indexe.htm](http://meteoros.de/indexe.htm)





Capturing rainbows with a camera becomes much easier when you know where to look. Remembering the rainbow types and their angular distances means that, with a bit of practice, you'll find you can predict a rainbow before you actually see it. The following experiences of mine may inform your own rainbow-hunting excursions.

### 1. SALTWATER WAVEBOW

The south-western corner of Australia is not only blessed with a globally significant diversity of flower species but is also an excellent area to see morning rainbows over the ocean. Walking on the Cape to Cape Track, along the limestone cliffs, I was surprised and delighted to find a bright rainbow appearing rhythmically in the saltwater waves of the Indian Ocean.

### 2. FOGBOW

A rainbow over cold fog can be

encountered on snowfields or on cold mornings. A crisp and bright morning snowshoe in the Australian Alps can bring you into patches of fog hanging in depressions, where these fogbows sometimes appear.

### 3. DOUBLE BOW

On the road through the Australian Alps, when the clouds were bringing rain in isolated pockets, a brilliant double rainbow splashed down from the sky. As one cloud drifted away, leaving me in sunshine, the raindrops falling from the cloud nearby refracted the light strongly so I could see the difference in colour orientation between the two bows.

### 4. SOLAR HALO

There must have been a region of ice crystals high overhead between the mid-morning sun and where I stood

when I spotted this 22-degree halo and photographed it from beneath a grass tree.

### 5. AT RAINBOW'S END

An afternoon bushwalk on Mount Wellington west of Hobart will often provide bright rainbows dropping down towards the city and Derwent River. These rainbows are often cut off abruptly when strong afternoon sun dips behind the summit.

### 6. SUNDOG

Looking westwards at sunset from the coastal escarpment at Nightcliff in Darwin, I photographed a rare evening sundog near the horizon and level with the sun. While its colours were faint compared to the brightness of the sunset, the arcing shape and the angular size revealed a fragment of a 22-degree halo. When sundogs are exceptionally strong, horizontal beams radiate outwards from the halo. [W](#)

# Wild Magazine

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Longfinned eel in the Upper Bellinger River, NSW  
Photo: Gary Bell/Oceanwideimages



## Swimming elver leather and a good skinning

There's much more to an eel out of water story than you might think, explains *Steve Van Dyck*

In 1980, Lynn 'Lightning' Millard set a record with his third successive win in the World Eel-skinning Championship at the Branholme Bushwackers' Carnival. Millard managed to skin two eels, gutting and preparing them for the table in just 50.6 seconds. Asked how he found the competition, Lightning said: "Everybody here's as keen as mustard...I reckon eel-skinning is about to really take off as a world sport." But history tells us that the world was flicking eels long before the bushwackers slipped into the sport.

Pliny wrote that the Romans used to skin eels and use the leather to whip naughty boys. In the 16th century, Rabelais wrote: "...whereupon his master gave him such a sound lash with an eel-skin that his own skin would have been worth nothing to make bagpipe bags of". But for all their familiarity with humble freshwater eels (*Anguilla* spp.),

our ancestors were totally ignorant as to where any of the world's 15 species came from. Aristotle said that eels sprang from 'the entrails of the earth' (worms that is), and Pliny thought when an eel rubbed its body against stones, the small pieces of skin that were scraped off became baby eels. Today, some members of the Flat Earth Society still maintain that eels arise from horse hairs left to soak in water.

The conundrum concerning the origin of baby freshwater eels was, until about 80 years ago, a complete and genuine mystery. No one ever saw pairs of eels spawning, their eggs were never seen, and eels smaller than about eight centimetres were unheard of in freshwater.

Our four Australian species of freshwater eels, of which the shortfinned (*Anguilla australis*) and longfinned (*A. reinhardtii*) from the east coast are the most common, were

no exception. What some people had noticed, however, were two bizarre phenomena associated with eels.

One was that about every three years in summer or autumn after exceptional rain, large, fat, silver-coloured shortfinned eels around a metre long and three kilograms in weight would migrate downstream on a lemming-style push to the open sea. Hundreds of them might be seen swimming to within a few metres of a dam spillway, then suddenly turning around and sliding tail-first over the edge. As much as half a tonne of eels could be caught in less than a few hours.

The other more staggering phenomenon was a migration in the reverse direction, where millions of lead pencil-sized eels, called elvers, would leave the ocean and swim on a desperate upstream invasion of freshwater streams, swamps and dams.





Shortfinned eel  
Photo: Gary Cranitch,  
Queensland Museum

## Some members of the Flat Earth Society still maintain that eels arise from horse hairs left to soak in water.

Like a squirming mass of thick rice noodles, the eels might climb near-vertical dam walls, 20-metre waterfalls, rock faces and even travel over open moist ground. Eels and larger eels thus find their way into isolated dams, concrete water tanks and not uncommonly into electricity-generating and pumping stations where they block pipes and dislocate the machinery.

The two migrations are part of the same slithering strategy. Adult eels that may have spent as long as 35 years in freshwater (up to 60 years in the New Zealand longfinned eel, *A. dieffenbachii*) swim out of our eastern rivers and migrate up to 3,000 kilometres to an area in the Coral Sea near New Caledonia, where they spawn. Females lay between five and 10 million eggs and then, presumably, die.

The eggs, laid in waters up to 300 metres deep, hatch after two to 10 days into minute ribbon-like larvae, which are carried south by the East Australian Current for 12 to 18 months. Near the Continental Shelf they change into a more cylindrical shape and, because of their see-through appearance, are known as 'glass eels'. Finally they develop pigment, increase in size and, as eels,

migrate upstream in their millions. Those eels that follow falling salinity and rising water temperatures into freshwater develop into females, while those that stay in the estuaries develop into males.

Land-locked longfinned eels which, because of protracted drought, miss out on their terminal trip to New Caledonia and remain isolated in deep lakes for many years, may reach monumental weights over 20 kilograms, growing thicker across the beam than a four-litre paint tin and over a metre and a half in length. Those that do manage to escape undergo dramatic changes to their bodies on the way downstream. They change colour from olive green or blotchy brown to grey-green on top with silver-white bellies, their reproductive organs grow in anticipation of the great Coral Sea slip-and-tickle, and their stomachs degenerate so they can no longer feed. In the end, the anus of such hell-bent eels close up as an insurance against water loss in the ocean.

The rest of the eel story is one of eat and be eaten. Adult freshwater eels are nature's consummate opportunists, eating insects, fish, molluscs and water plants, and (particularly long-fins) tackling anything

from dead sheep, cats, rabbits, rats, rotten eggs and ducks to water dragons, crayfish and human toes. A memorable clip from the movie *The Tin Drum* showed a horse's head being used to catch eels. They are also not averse to eating their own eels or leaving the water to reach a tasty morsel.

On the other side of the coin, many say that an eel caught from a stony creek makes for one of the finest-flavoured fish available. If it wasn't for their snake-like appearance and an unnerving habit of twisting and writhing in the pan hours after being cleaned and cut up, they would probably be thought of as more than just sport for boys playing truant.

For some, the sport has paid off. In the period 2012–13, 300 tonnes of Australian shortfinned and longfinned eels, worth approximately AU\$4.3 million, were shipped live (260 tonnes, mostly to South-East Asia) or purged in freshwater, gutted, frozen and exported (40 tonnes, mostly to Europe). And according to Pat Nash, promotions officer for the Bushwackers' Carnival: "People like them boiled or baked, you can smoke them or jelly them, however you cook eels they taste lovely." **W**

*Dr Steve Van Dyck is retiring as senior curator of vertebrates at the Queensland Museum and hanging up his columnist hat. The Wild team wishes him all the best in his retirement and offers enormous thanks for his lively and fascinating contributions to the magazine over the past three and a half years.*

# A right lovely spread

You don't need a dinner table for a feast, explains *Andrew Davison*

As the sun swaggered over the horizon, I woke wearily and rolled from my tent. My belly churned, still reeling from a New Year's Eve feast beneath a star-filled sky on the summit of Mount Howitt. Together with a small group of friends I had seen in the New Year in the style it deserved, an array of delights spread on a groundsheet before the glory of the Crosscut Saw. Beginning with aperitifs—a plastic mug of red wine, a selection of cheeses and saucisson—we then indulged in

parmesan, tomato and olive tarts over a sunset stroll. On our return we prepared pizzas and pan-baked vegetables with prunes, almonds and honey accompanied by dried tomatoes and preserved lemon salad, plus a few more bottles of red and a sweet and spicy warm fruit salad to finish.

Breakfast was supposed to be banana pancakes with coconut and kaffir lime syrup, but we couldn't manage it.

It may not be on every walk we can camp with such decadence as on that

five-day trip. But a birthday, anniversary or long-overdue reunion walk deserves a celebrative meal.

For the lovers of cooking it also offers the opportunity to impress friends and experiment with new techniques and blends of ingredients. The more people you invite on a gastronomic bushwalk, the more resources you have at your finger tips.

Two stoves and two sets of pots gives you greater ability to create a range of complimentary dishes.





### PIZZA (pictured left)

Pizza can be a little time consuming if there is only one stove, but it is relatively easy to make and the preparations can be an enjoyable team effort.

Serves 2

1¼ cup of flour  
¼ teaspoon of salt  
½ cup of water

Toppings might include: tomato paste, pesto, cheese, anchovies, olives, salami, dried pineapple (rehydrated), herbs, garlic, onion, dried mushrooms, dried tomatoes in oil, pine nuts, salmon

### IN THE FIELD

Combine flour, salt and water and mix into a soft dough. Break into pieces and spread using your water bottle as a rolling pin, flattening to just a little smaller than your fry pan. Place the ungreased fry pan on a low heat and cook each base on one side until brown

(approximately two to five minutes each). Place chosen toppings on cooked side of base, return to fry pan over low heat under an upturned large pot and cook for a further five to seven minutes until the bottom has browned, toppings have warmed through and cheese has melted.

### HOT POT (above)

Methylated spirit stoves are ideal for hot pot, which is a great communal dish because the broth can be continually topped up with more ingredients after each serving. It may be necessary to add more water periodically to the base soup, with the last servings usually the most flavorful.

Serves 2

1.5 litres of water  
Stock cubes  
3 dessert spoons of tahini  
3 dessert spoons of soy sauce

1 dessert spoon of hoisin sauce  
2 chopped spring onions  
6 pieces of pickled garlic  
2 jalapeño chilies  
4 thin slices of ginger

Other ideas: fresh coriander, shredded cabbage, julienne carrots, sliced cucumber, sliced sweet potato, slice Japanese radish, bok choy, dried mushrooms, dried seaweed, dried bean curd, cashews, pastrami, beef jerky, salmon, glass noodles

### IN THE FIELD

Create a simple broth with the stock cubes and add tahini, soy and hoisin sauce. Once the foundation stock is hot, begin adding the array of ingredients you have brought to bulk it out and boil until heated through. Imagination really is the limit with hot pot—I have had it containing bull penis and horse belly, though I don't recommend these.

**Please note:** These menu ideas are not designed as a practical extended walk menu but for leisurely feasts in the bush.



# Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary

*Bruce and Alistair Paton embark on a five-day walk in the northern Flinders Ranges*

*View from the summit of Mt Painter looking towards Freeling Heights*



When heading into the wilderness it's always a good idea to ascertain up-to-date track conditions and to check whether water supplies are available, accessible and above all, not radioactive. The last one isn't usually on the checklist but it became very relevant during a phone call to a kindly guide at Arkaroola, who informed us (in a classic outback drawl) that yes, the Mount Painter Well did likely have water in it, but we probably shouldn't drink that water on account of the well being sunk into the middle of a massive uranium deposit. Fortunately, there is water on the surface that isn't radioactive and 4WD tours can drop off supplies to remote parts of the property, but this was our first clue that, even on a continent full of amazing bushwalking destinations, Arkaroola is different.

Situated at the far northern end of South Australia's Flinders Ranges, the privately owned Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary covers 61,000 hectares of rugged mountains, dry creekbeds and some of the most fascinating geology to be found anywhere. Saved for the public by geologist Reginald Sprigg—who is most famous for discovering the world's oldest animal fossils in the nearby Ediacara Hills—the sanctuary was also a favourite of Sir Douglas Mawson (yes, that Sir Douglas Mawson) who declared to Sprigg his hope that Arkaroola and its 1,800 million-year-old rocks one day "be recognised as one great natural museum, one protected into posterity from over-development, vermin and vandalism." In 2012 his vision finally became reality, with the South

Australian Government declaring the rich mineral resources of Arkaroola off-limits to mining after a protracted conservation battle.

Most visitors who travel this way see the area via 4WD, usually on one of the tours operated by the Arkaroola ecotourism resort. However, trekking the area on foot provides a whole new perspective on the landscape and an unforgettable experience.

The following notes are for a five-day walk but this could easily be shortened by a day or two. The days are not long but campsites are limited and the rough terrain, and lack of formed tracks and water, make it prudent to be conservative in planning. It also allows you to soak up a unique wild landscape. Just check before you drink the water.

The Armchair at sunrise



## ACCESS

Arkaroola is 700 kilometres north of Adelaide. From Port Augusta drive 107 kilometres north to Hawker then continue on the Leigh Creek Road, ignoring the turn-off to Wilpena Pound on the right, and drive north along a very flat and straight highway that follows the western edge of the Flinders Ranges. For a distance the road runs parallel to the Adelaide–Alice Springs rail line so The Ghan might overtake you. Leigh Creek is 155 kilometres further on and represents a rare opportunity to fill up on petrol and basic supplies at a roadhouse. A few kilometres past Leigh Creek, take the major turn-off to the right on what is initially called the Balcoona Road. The road soon becomes dry gravel (easily passable in a two-wheel drive vehicle) for a 150-kilometre eastward journey cutting through the gap between the Flinders and Gammon Ranges. At the other end, turn left on to Arkaroola Road and follow the signs to the lodge.

## WEATHER

Hot and dry. In summer it is usually at least 35 degrees during the day, so not great for walking. Better to visit from May–September when the mercury is around the 20-degree mark. Year-round there are only about five cloudy days a month, which explains why this is one of Australia's premier astronomy destinations.

## FLORA & FAUNA

The area is home to plentiful native animals but due to the heat you aren't likely to encounter many of them, though you might catch a prized sighting of the endangered yellow-footed rock wallaby (keep your eyes peeled on the rocky cliffs and riverbanks). Reptiles including the colourful painted dragon

are also common and there are more than 160 recorded bird species in the sanctuary. Be prepared for a lot of grass trees and spinifex, iconic Australian plants of the dry bushland and desert that intersect in the ranges. Both thrive in the dry, nutrient-poor soils of the northern Flinders Ranges. Around Mount Painter the spinifex clumps are home to an important population of the short-tailed grasswren, which nest in the base of the hummocks and move between plants to feed. The most prominent larger tree is the river red gum, which lines most of the dry creekbeds.

## CAMPING & ACCOMMODATION

Bush campsites are abundant and Arkaroola has accommodation to suit most budgets, from hotel-style rooms to a bunkhouse and camping area with powered and unpowered sites. The campground has a laundry with basic facilities, showers, toilets and gas barbecues. [arkaroola.com.au](http://arkaroola.com.au)

## SAFETY

This is the desert, don't take it lightly. Always take plenty of water and let someone know where you're going and when you expect to return. An emergency beacon is recommended as there is no mobile phone reception. It's a good idea to wear gaiters to protect against the prickly spinifex and the danger of snakebite.

## TRACKS

There are several day walks from the lodge that you can undertake yourself or on a guided tour. Once you get beyond the immediate surrounds of the accommodation there aren't many marked trails, though 4WD tracks criss-cross the ranges. Experience in



off-track navigation and sturdy boots to negotiate tough, rocky terrain, are essential.

## MAPS

The hike is covered by 1:50,000 maps for Wooltana and Yundnamutana (you'll need both). The resort usually has maps available but can't be relied upon; best to pick them up before you leave home, as with all bushwalking equipment.

## DAY 1: ARKAROOLA RESORT TO ECHO WATERHOLE

Before starting off it is recommended to talk to the friendly staff at the wilderness lodge about getting a helping hand with supplies—they can be persuaded to drop off water at the campsite at the base of Mount Gee, which is on the popular Ridgetop Tour. Start by following the gravel track north from the resort towards Arkaroola Waterhole. The wide road climbs to follow an exposed ridgetop with views of the surrounding hills. Pass a helipad and, after about three kilometres, a cairn opposite Mount Oliphant that explains the mountain's history (it was named after Sir Marcus Laurence Elwin Oliphant, a famous South Australian physicist, state governor and friend of the Sprigg family). From here the road heads downhill. Ignore turnoffs to the left to Arkaroola Waterhole and then the Ridgetop Track, instead taking the right fork towards Echo Waterhole. The road circles around the south-eastern side of Dinnertime Hill before a clear junction is reached. Turn right following the signs to Echo Camp Backtrack and follow the

rough road behind a rocky ridge for about a kilometre to get to Echo Camp Waterhole, where there are numerous spots to pitch a tent beside a wide section of Arkaroola Creek. If you're lucky, the creek may even have water in it, though it should be boiled before drinking.

## DAY 2: ECHO WATERHOLE TO PAINTER POUND

Retrace your steps along the backtrack to the junction and turn right. After about 500 metres the track swings around the east, then north, before petering out in a large dry creek junction. This is where Radium Creek from the north meets Arkaroola Creek and on the eastern side of the junction is a cairn marking the old Echo campsite. From here the route follows the dry creekbed north for about a kilometre to American Gap, where red cliffs close in from both sides. This is a good spot to look for endangered yellow-footed rock wallabies, which can sometimes be seen hopping up and down the cliffs. After American Gap the creek becomes overgrown and less defined as it winds

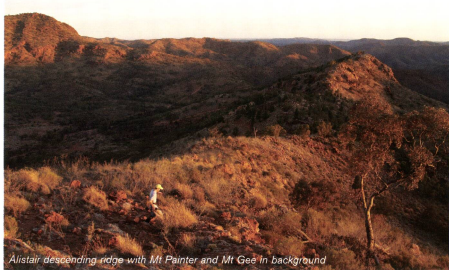
north-west. In sections the creek splits and it is necessary to do some searching to find clear stretches of sand between the thickets of dry and often prickly undergrowth. For most of the way there is little shade. There is some relief from the scrub-bashing when the 4WD Ridgetop Track descends to the creekbed and runs along the sand for a short distance. Keep an eye out for a large, dark rock outcrop on the ridgeline above—this is the visible portion of a rich vein of uranium ore, which was once mined for the Manhattan Project to produce the atomic bombs America dropped on Japan in World War II. Continue along the creek, crossing the vehicle track one more time before running into a dry waterfall on the southern side of Mount Gee. Climb around the waterfall (the Ridgetop Track is about 50 metres to the right if needed) and continue north to a junction of 4WD tracks, where the Ridgetop Track turns sharply right next to the creek. About 50 metres north is an old wooden weather station. Here, find a spot to pitch a tent and the water that has been dropped off for you. If you're short for time you can hitch a ride on the Ridgetop Tour and camp here before hiking out, but be sure to book early.

## DAY 3: SHORT WALKS TO MOUNT GEE (1HR), MOUNT PAINTER (3HRS) & THE ARMCHAIR (3HRS)

The country around Painter Pound is well worth exploring, and there is easily enough to see to occupy a full day without full packs. If you don't have an extra day it is recommended to do at least one of these trips in the evening or early morning.

**Mount Gee** was a favourite of Sir Douglas Mawson, who dubbed it the Crystal Candy Mountain. The name unfortunately didn't stick, but it is easy to see where he got the idea. More than a billion years ago, the area was home to a rich network of geysers and hot springs, and as the boiling water circulated underground it deposited quartz crystals that today make up much of the mountain. From the campsite follow the 4WD track north for 50 metres, then turn left on to a rough vehicle track that heads steeply uphill then begins to level off as it contours along the slope of the ridge. Leave it at this point and scramble to the top, heading left along the crest of the ridge to the summit of Mount Gee for great views of Mount Painter and surrounds.

From the campsite head south and uphill along Ridgetop Track for a few hundred metres until you reach a knoll where the road starts to descend to Radium Creek. Leave the track here and cut across two



Alistair descending ridge with Mt Painter and Mt Gee in background

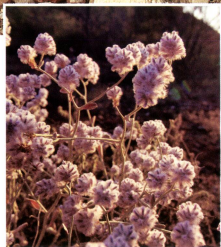


Crystalline quartz on Mt Gee ridge





Allstar hiking in Radium Creek



shallow saddles to the ridge leading east towards the summit of **Mount Painter**. Follow the ridge uphill as it climbs steadily to the base of red cliffs; there are several spots on the way that afford excellent views. At the base of the cliffs head left to sidle around the bluffs, climbing steadily. A steep climb up a scree slope then leads to a final scramble over boulders to the summit ridge, which is home to numerous grass trees. Pick a route across the rocks to a cairn marking the summit: the highest point in this section of Arkaroola. The views in all directions are simply sensational. Take care retracing your steps to the campsite, especially on the scree slope.

The most distinctive peak in Arkaroola is the massive lump of granite known as **The Armchair**. Follow the 4WD track north from the campsite, ignoring the rough vehicle track which heads left up Mount Gee. The track peters out after a while but continue in the same direction, climbing to reach a wide saddle. Mining companies have conducted uranium exploration in this area, so watch your step. The Armchair appears right ahead and though it looks unclimbable, an ascent is possible for those with a head for heights. Follow the gully from the base on the left-hand side, then climb the rocky ramp up the other 'arm'

of the chair to zigzag up the southern face. The final section is a hair-raising scramble to the top. You can vary the return trip by combining this walk with Mount Gee—when you get to the broad saddle head right and uphill. The next high point is the junction of Radium Ridge and an unnamed ridge to Mount Gee, turn south and follow this to the summit (avoid the next valley as this is the location of the Mount Painter Well and the aforementioned radioactivity).

#### DAY 4: PAINTER POUND TO ARKAROOLA CREEK

From the campsite return south along Radium Creek—avoid the dry waterfall by following the Ridgetop Track for the first kilometre or so until it crosses the creek.

Turn left here and follow the creekbed back to American Gap, where there is some shade, making a good lunch spot.

The campsite for the night is less than a kilometre south; simply continue along Radium Creek to the wide sandy junction with Arkaroola Creek, marked by the old Echo Camp cairn. The flats on the riverbank just south of the cairn make an excellent campsite. Just take care not to camp too close to any of the giant river red gums, which are known to drop branches without warning, or in the creekbed itself, which can flash head south towards the rocky knoll in this part of the world.

#### DAY FIVE: ARKAROOLA CREEK TO ARKAROOLA RESORT

Walk downstream along Arkaroola Creek for a short distance, looking for a vehicle track that runs into the creekbed from the south (traversed in the other direction on the first day). It can take some finding; if in doubt head south towards the rocky knoll directly ahead. If you don't stumble across it on the way a short scramble up the slope will be enough to locate the track. Pick up the road and head west before the track curves south to meet the junction with the Echo Camp Backtrack. From this point retrace your steps from day one back to the resort. **W**

## Wild puts water bottles, filters and purifiers to the test to help you rehydrate efficiently



### **Polar Bottle Sport 20oz | \$21.95 | [bicyclepeddler.com.au](http://bicyclepeddler.com.au)**

This incredibly lightweight sports bottle (132g), which I found especially handy for biking, kept four big ice cubes frozen for around 90 minutes on a 32C day and didn't make water taste at all plastic-y. When I left it in the freezer overnight, half-full, I found that water stayed cool for just over three hours. The insulating, light-reflecting foil layer between the two food-grade polyethylene layers succeeds in making this an affordable cross between an insulated metal bottle and a lightweight standard one, while the grooved shape makes it easy to grab while on the move. It's a shame the spout isn't protected from contamination, but the removable drinking valve and dishwasher-safe material allows for thorough cleaning. The conventional sports cap is not as comfortable on the lips as other mouthpieces tested and the main groove is a bit too high to squeeze out a decent flow.



### **Klean Kanteen Insulated 473ml | \$38.95 | [kleankanteen.com](http://kleankanteen.com)**

I was impressed to find near-boiling water still too hot to gulp when I checked this 248g bottle after five hours hanging from my pack on a warm day. Indeed, the double-walled, stainless steel construction is designed to keep hot beverages that way for up to six hours and iced drinks cool for more than 24. The bottle's electropolished interior doesn't hold any taste, and I didn't worry about dropping it because of the rounded metal and sturdy, leakproof cap. The 54mm opening makes this easy to fill and clean, and the fact you can change the cap for a different one is an added advantage.

### **Klean Kanteen Classic 800ml | \$24.95 | [Kleankanteen.com](http://Kleankanteen.com)**

As the flagship of Klean Kanteen's range of toxin-free stainless steel containers, this is a durable, single-walled water bottle with 44mm opening that fits easily into car cup holders and pack loops. While heavier than a plastic alternative at 174g (minus cap), I liked knowing the cap threads wouldn't wear out. I'd opt for the plain steel model as it can be used over a stove if desperate, though I didn't scratch the acrylic paint after several days of solid abuse. My only worry was how easy it would be to lose the cap without an O-ring to secure it.

### **Klean Kanteen Wide-Mouth 1900ml | \$41.95 | [kleankanteen.com](http://kleankanteen.com)**

Like the insulated bottle, this 1,900ml brushed-steel model features an opening that fits standard pump filters. Hefty at 330g when empty (minus the D-ring cap, 1.5kg when full) and around 11cm wide, this is handy for car camping or if you have a super-sized thirst and kept water cooler than the majority of bottles tested. A few dents didn't make any difference to its temperature regulation but it would be handy to have some form of cord to hold the bottle by when gathering water.



### **Kor Nava Hydration Vessel 700ml | \$34.95 | [korwater.com.au](http://korwater.com.au)**

Aimed at urban rather than outdoor exploration and weighing in at 340g when empty, the innovative Kor Nava bottle nevertheless gets a mention for its one-handed usability. The ergonomic thumb button allows you to propel the watertight lid out of the way quickly while the EasyFlow sip-it straw eliminates the need to tilt, squeeze or excessively suck from the bottle. I only found myself biting at the mouthpiece when the water was about five centimetres from finished. The real innovation, however, is the replaceable coconut shell filter that cleanses tap water of impurities as you sip without adding any chemical taste or smell. This flattish, Tritan copolyester bottle is comfortable to hold by the body or its two-finger handle, which is much bulkier than the Camelbak Chute one, and is available in four colours.



Camelbak Chute 750ml | \$24.95 and 1L \$29.95 | [seatosummitdistribution.com.au](http://seatosummitdistribution.com.au)

New for 2014, Camelbak's Chute wide-mouth bottle was a favourite for its quick-to-close spout with interior threads to prevent water dripping down the outside and the glove-friendly, two-finger handle. I worried the hygienic cap would come loose as it only takes half a turn to lock but it didn't leak a drop, and I appreciated the lid tether when filling. The large, angled spout offers one of the most natural drinking experiences, though I was concerned the cap interior could crack eventually because of the way you have to edge it over the spout. The BPA-free plastic didn't flex so much under pressure as to make me worry about durability, and the measurement markings are a nice feature. This is an economic option if you're looking for a high-flow bottle.



Kathmandu Drink Bottle with Cooling Device 650ml | \$29.98 | [kathmandu.com.au](http://kathmandu.com.au)

The freezable plastic straw inside this basic bottle with nifty hook-on lid may seem like a waste of valuable space on longer journeys, but it's a comforting extra on short sweaty outings. I found water remained pleasantly cool for two hours on a 32C day. The removable sipper helps limit the bulky straw from sloshing water up your face and keeps the straw from rattling around. The rubber spray finish in pink or yellow should help you differentiate your bottle around camp, and I suppose the straw could be used loose in another bottle, but I'd be inclined to wait for the sale price.



Nalgene On The Fly 650ml | \$17.95 | [nalgene.com](http://nalgene.com)

This narrow, 136g bottle has a silicone seal inside the cap and locking hook to prevent spillages. I liked that the polypropylene loop-top can be popped open one-handed, though it can be tricky to tell whether you've pressed the button hard enough and—unlike the Kor Nava—you still have to flick the top further to drink. The measurement scale offers both ounces and millilitres and the mouthpiece offers a similar flow as the Camelbak Chute, but I found myself wishing the top would lock out of the way. I fear the metal hook could come unhinged easily, but the Tritan copolyester is said to be tougher than other polycarbonates. This didn't keep liquid as cool as the cheaper Polar Bottle.

Nalgene Cantene | 3L | \$17.95 [nalgene.com](http://nalgene.com)

Water or snow collection is easy with this flexible wide-mouth container, which is made of BPA-free multi-layer film that can cope with being dropped repeatedly and only weighs around 84g when empty. It folds right up to the loop-top cap, the gusseted bottom keeps it stable when full and the lid is designed not to freeze shut the way that smaller bottles can do in icy conditions. I found this a good option for filtering water into or mixing flavoured drinks in as it can be easily rinsed out and the polyethylene handle makes for easy pouring. My only concern was whether the seam around the neck would eventually start leaking.

Nalgene Tritan Wide-Mouth Bottle | 1L | \$14.95 (pictured overleaf)

This bestselling, odour-proof, easy-clean bottle was our preferred attachment for pump filters because of its low-profile design, relative low weight of 179g and O-ring-secured lid. This has the advantage that it can be used as a hot water bottle, unlike the scalding steel options, and the impact-resistant copolyester is stain resistant. As the bottle that started the wide-mouth trend, this is ideal as a measuring jug when cooking. The cap can also be swapped for an On The Fly or MultiDrink one (with a straw).





**Platypus Softbottle 1L | \$13.95 | [spelean.com.au](http://spelean.com.au)**

This collapsible BPA-free bottle is seriously handy, easily stuffing into any pocket or drink holder, and at 35g weighs only a fifth of what an equivalent-capacity hard bottle would when empty. The food-grade polyethylene lining doesn't leech any plastic taste into the water and the fact you can change the screw cap for a different style one is a bonus. I did miss the handle found on the Playpus Plusbottle, and the narrow opening makes it slightly trickier to fill, albeit easier to drink from, than the lareg Nalgene equivalent.



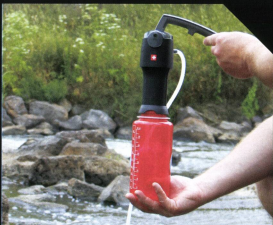
**Lifeventure Tritan Flask 1L | \$20.95 | [expeditionequipment.com.au](http://expeditionequipment.com.au)**

Lifeventure's equivalent of the Nalgene wide-mouth bottle uses the same tough copolyester and measurement scale, but a chunkier screw-on lid and retaining loop that add about 10g. The translucent finish makes it easy to judge the quality of the water you have collected and the grooves on the side make it secure in your grip. Also available in a 650ml size, this is a reliable single-walled bottle that won't make your water taste plastic-y. The only negative I experienced was the tendency of the lid to pop up against your hand so that you need to simultaneously apply downward pressure and turn it to close.



**Platypus Gravityworks 4L | \$189.00 | [spelean.com.au](http://spelean.com.au)**

This was extremely easy to use when collecting water from a river or waterhole, though smaller sources might be tricky. I was impressed the handily labelled dirty bladder could simply be laid on slightly higher ground or a rock above the clean one in order for water to start trickling through the 0.2 micron hollow fibre filter, and a litre was purified in just over a minute without any effort. For base camp-style adventures, this system is ideal because of its speed, four-litre capacity and the low likelihood of malfunction. At around 300g the system is also lightweight and compact enough for solo use, and the filter expected to last through 1,500 litres. The antimicrobial-treated system is simpler to clean (by back flushing) than ceramic options, and I appreciated being able to carry water inside the bladder itself rather than a separate container. It's necessary to pre-treat water to eliminate viruses or chemicals, but the speed of filtration and carrying makes up for this.



**Katadyn Vario Microfilter | \$149.95 | [katadyn.com](http://katadyn.com)**

This compact, Swiss-made filter with powerful dual-piston pump is seriously fast and easy to use for one person, and to disassemble for cleaning. I liked being able to switch between the faster flow setting (using the pleated 0.3 micron fiberglass filter) when gathering from a clean-looking stream, and the higher filtration setting (which engages the replaceable ceramic prefilter) when relying on murkier water. I was impressed that the activated carbon core, which is also replaceable, succeeded in eliminating the muddy taste from fairly cloudy water and felt secure in the knowledge that any bacteria, protozoan cysts or chemicals had been removed. The bulkier handle of the top-heavy unit made this easier to pump than the MSR MiniWorks, easily filling a litre bottle in under a minute on the two-stage mode, though the two weigh about the same all up. The input hose in the starter pack was slightly shorter than MSR's and a bit fiddly to fix on to the intake strainer even with lubricant, and the system takes up slightly more space in your pack. Designed to last for up to 1,875 litres or six months of continuous use, this seems an efficient option if weight isn't your main concern.

**MSR MiniWorks Ex Water Filter | \$159 | [spelean.com.au](http://spelean.com.au)**

This compact, ceramic pump filter takes some muscle but is celebrated for its longevity (it can last 2,000 cycles, compared to the Platypus Gravityworks' 1,500) and I was able to purify a litre of fairly murky water in under two minutes without rushing. I liked knowing the 0.2 micron filter would block even smaller bacteria than the Katadyn Vario and neither river water nor pretreated water retained any bad taste. I worried the replaceable ceramic cartridge might clog or pressure build up inside the housing, and would be tempted to prefilter very silty water through some fabric, but experienced no such issues. Output water appeared clearer than after using the other filters tested here and the filter is also easy to scrape clean in the field. This is quick to assemble and screws easily on to a Nalgene wide-mouth bottle, though you could also use an output hose.

**Lifesystems Chlorine Dioxide Droplets | \$18.95 (30ml x 2) and**

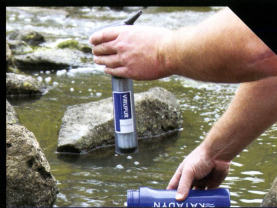
**Lifesystems High Strength Chlorine Dioxide Tablets | (\$26.95 for 30) [expeditionequipment.com.au](http://expeditionequipment.com.au)**

The lightest option available, these chlorine droplets are more fiddly and time-consuming than the SteriPen at around 20 minutes per litre of clear river water and my sample leaked before the first use. I could handle the aftertaste and odour without neutralising tablets by focusing on the fact the chemical had eliminated bacteria, cysts and viruses, and appreciated being able to do other things around camp while my water purified, as with the Platypus filter.

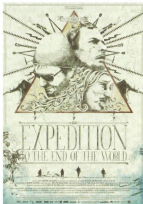
The 30-tablet pack of extra-strength tabs works out nearly three times more expensive, but tabs work twice as quick. It's worth noting that *Katadyn Micropur Forte* tablets with silver ions claim to preserve water for six months for the much lower price of \$39.95 per 100 tabs. Lifesystems also offers cheaper, standard chlorine tablets but these do not treat against cryptosporidium and giardia, and leave a stronger aftertaste.

**SteriPen Freedom | \$199 | [steripen.com](http://steripen.com)**

This lightest of the SteriPen systems, at around 74g, took about the same time as the Katadyn Vario filter to purify one litre of clear water and can be easily carried in a pocket. While pre-filtering is needed for water containing a lot of particulate, the SteriPen's ability to destroy viruses gives it the advantage over pump and gravity filter options when travelling in unfamiliar areas. The integrated USB or solar-rechargeable battery is convenient but I did worry about not being able to replace it if it malfunctioned. The simplicity and lack of maintenance is a major bonus—the ultraviolet light flicks on when submerged and the green light for 'go' means you don't have to clock-watch – and the light is designed to last up to 8,000 cycles. I appreciated the lack of chemical aftertaste but did worry that water on the threads of the bottle top hadn't been purified. Slightly more expensive than pump options, this is ideal for overseas and solo summer trips.

**Katadyn MyBottle Purifier | \$89.95 | [katadyn.com](http://katadyn.com)**

This 560ml purifying vessel with three-layer ViruPur filter (containing a 0.3 micron fiberglass cyst filter, iodinated resin cartridge and activated carbon) is a low-effort option when bushwalking solo in areas with plentiful water or travelling in developing countries. I liked the hands-free, flip-up mouthpiece on this food-grade polyethylene bottle, but did have to suck and squeeze quite hard to get a decent flow going to begin with. It's made to last up to 155 cycles, which you can check on the internal cartridge life counter, and can be used as a standard 750ml bottle if desired. At 260g, it's not as useful for lightweight hiking as the Platypus Gravityworks or chemical treatments but you can't argue with the fill-and-go convenience. I wasn't as confident drinking from this because of the opaque plastic but water tasted fine and I liked being able to hook it on the outside of my pack.



## 1. EXPEDITION TO THE END OF THE WORLD

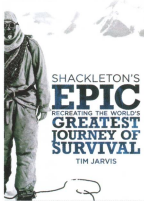
Dir. Daniel Denzic (Expeditionthemovie.dk, 2013, DVD release TBC)

This haunting Danish documentary sees a motley crew of scientists and artists sail a historic three-mast schooner into the north-eastern fjords of Greenland only recently unlocked by to global warming. The fact we don't learn exactly what has motivated the trip, and only belatedly discover that the characters are part of larger group of visitors, adds to an overall sense of trespassing somewhere sacred and encourages you to slip into the same philosophical mood as the slightly barney art photographer onboard. While the lack of time markers or traditional narrative can be alienating, there are discoveries of new species and giant fish as well as the threat of a polar bear attack to keep momentum. Talking heads wryly suggest mankind moves to Switzerland or swaps cars for rafts to escape climate change but the film doesn't ram eco messages down your throat, focusing more on the question of whether the next dominant species after we have self-destructed will have our capacity to appreciate the planet's beauty. The cinematography is sublime and the mixture of Mozart and Metallica in the soundtrack reinforces the crew's clumsiness, one member tripping over and setting off a rifle by accident, while glaciers melt collapse around them in real time. As an arthouse tribute to one of the last remaining wildernesses, and the secrets it might hold about Earth's future, this is a unique if occasionally befuddling film.

## 2. SHACKLETON'S EPIC, RECREATING THE WORLD'S GREATEST JOURNEY OF SURVIVAL

By Tim Jarvis (Harper Collins, 2013, \$45)

This companion to the Discovery Channel doco charts the attempt by Adelaide-based adventurer Tim Jarvis to recreate Ernest Shackleton's survival trek across sea and ice to save the shipwrecked crew of the *Endurance* in 1916. Going into great detail on the six-year planning process for an expedition that saw six men cross the world's roughest ocean in a replica seven-metre boat using celestial navigation while wearing period clothing, Jarvis has you cursing the insurance men, border authorities and "media beast". With the record for longest unsupported journey in Antarctica under his belt, it's a surprise to learn of Jarvis' nightmares before departure, which makes you cheer all the more as he rebuffs suggestions by people in possession of modern satellite data that he cancel the land crossing. When we leave the importance-of-good-recruitment speechifying behind, the description of the trip itself—which was beset by similar missteps as the original—is sprinkled with humour and evocative extracts from the original navigator's diary. Through frequent comparisons to worse episodes faced by Shackleton, who didn't get to camp 10 metres from a support vessel, Jarvis reveals the "double-edged sword" which potential rescue can be for modern explorers as well as just how far the glacier fields have retreated.



## Directory

**The Wild Directory is a comprehensive reference point for international outdoors-related businesses. You can list your firm for only \$48 an issue (\$58 in spot red).**

For more information, contact Gayle Shapcott via email on [gayleshapcott@primcreative.com.au](mailto:gayleshapcott@primcreative.com.au) or telephone 03 9590 8766

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Collaroy Beach, NSW 2097  
[outdoorhacks.com.au](http://outdoorhacks.com.au)

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Sydney 2000  
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71 York St  
Launceston 7250  
Ph: 03 6331 3644

#### Victoria

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Melbourne 3000  
Ph: 03 9600 0599  
[bogong.com.au](http://bogong.com.au)

Canoes Plus Pty Ltd  
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Kew East 3102  
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The Wilderness Shop Pty Ltd  
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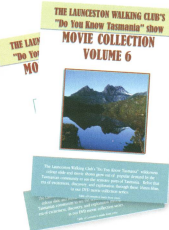
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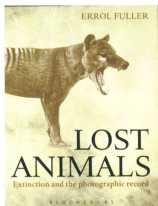
Dir. Launceston Walking Club (Launcestonwalkingclub.org.au, 2013, \$20 each)

With a 16mm movie collection dating back to 1965, the Launceston Walking Club has digitised a varied and impressive series of trip reports from the 70s and 80s for its fifth volume. The best of the six episodes cover a family-friendly trip to climb the north and south peaks of Mount Geryon and a challenging walk in the Prince of Wales Range. Wild West-style theme music, a British-accented voiceover and the golden glow of the impressive panoramas evoke more than a bit of nostalgia for more innocent times and the sense "at least one corner of this world is at peace". Produced for the club's annual slide show, the episodes stress the accessibility of the Tasmanian wilderness to all ages and backgrounds—a 2,000ft drop "adds zest" to a scramble and rosy-cheeked children enjoy "all the thrills and spills anyone could ask for" at Ben Lomond. Though you only occasionally regret the lack of dialogue and ambient sound, the commentary by walkers in the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park episode of Volume 6 is welcome. Besides footage of a biscuit-stealing wombat and a funny sketch about the best ensemble to wear on the 'Overland Creek', the latest DVD also includes a 1930s tourism film that will have you thanking the gods for your ergonomic backpack. Several of the clips make you wish you hadn't thrown out that red lumberjack shirt that made you look all rugged and tough, but the New Harbour episode is perhaps most likely to have you heading for the Apple Isle.

### 4. LOST ANIMALS: EXTINCTION AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

By Errol Fuller (Bloomsbury, 2013, \$49.99)

This poignant collection of photos of birds and mammals lost to science between 1870 and 2004 is not the most uplifting text for your bookshelf but it draws you in, as if by discovering some hidden detail in a grainy image you might avert the global extinction crisis. Emotional extracts from the diaries of photographers and biologists accompany helpful notes on the current state of the species' habitat and the odd hopeful statement—could the paradise parrot be hiding in the outback? It is disconcerting to read how many of the species' fates were tied to events of the second world war, somehow reassuring that the shooter of one of the last Yangtze River dolphins died from eating part of it, and spooky that the laugh of the New Zealand laughing owl was more of a spine-tingling shriek, but the book also tells of miraculous rescues by conservationists and the evolution of wildlife photography. One of the longest chapters is understandably devoted to the Tassie tiger yawning on the cover, but a rare image of the bizarre Bubal hartbeest and the idea of people flocking to see the last living passenger pigeon at the Cincinnati Zoo after the bird had been shot down in its thousands linger just as long. As in 1987's *Extinct Birds*, Fuller reminds readers about the beauty of fauna we have lost and continue to lose.



Track Notes (from previous issues of *Wild*) provide essential instruction and information that no walker should be without. *WildGUIDES* are priced at \$8.20 each, individual Track Notes are \$5.99 each. Consult our online index at [wild.com.au](http://wild.com.au) to establish your requirements and order online or phone in your order on 03 9690 8766.

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# Blast from the PAST

## AROUND THIS TIME IN 1994

*Wild* published a news story about damage being done to the Gardens of Stone in the western Blue Mountains by mining subsidence. In the November of that year, the 11,780-hectare Gardens of Stone National Park was established. The battle to get the entire 40,000-hectare area listed as a state conservation area continues, but last autumn saw the NSW Department of Planning recommend that the proposal for a new open-cut coal mine near Lithgow be rejected because of the impacts it would have on these extraordinary rock pagodas, sandstone cliffs and canyons. Find out more at [colongwilderness.org.au](http://colongwilderness.org.au)

### Mining ruins Gardens of Stone

An area known as the Gardens of Stone, in the western Blue Mountains just north of Lithgow, is being ruined by mine subsidence. Cliff collapses and related surface fissures caused by coal-mining are brightening the landscape. (Also see the report in *Wild* no 50.)

The Department of Mineral Resources has monitored 179 cliff collapses at two collieries in the western coalfield - such damage is continuing unabated - to save part of the Black area, independent NSW Parliamentarian C. J. E. (The report in *Wild* no 50.)



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## WHOSE AD IS IT ANYWAY?

Answer in the next issue

Last issue: Eastwood Camping Centre, NSW

## As retirement beckons, world heritage planner Tim O'Loughlin reflects on his time in the Tasmanian wilderness

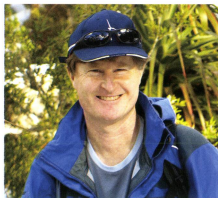
Perhaps atypically for someone who would go on to work in conservation, I had great fun competing in motorcycle trials growing up. Though pretty disastrous for the environment, riders had a deep appreciation for the bush and it involved lots of interstate camping trips. I still have a fascination with speed but these days it's on a mountain bike.

I studied a mixture of philosophy, psychology, botany and zoology at Monash and worked with the Native Forest Action Council University to promote an alpine national park joined to Kosciuszko. Talking to cattlemen who opposed the idea was my first real experience of dealing with a different world view. Dialogue has been my preferred approach ever since; if you look beneath the surface, cattlemen and bushwalkers have a lot of common ground.

After university I made Berghaus-style rucksacks for a while, then in 1981 took my first kayak trip down the Franklin—an amazing experience. The following year the blockade was being organised and I helped the Wilderness Society train people in non-violent action. I remember the highly charged atmosphere, with families in Strahan locked against each other. One of my most powerful memories is being arrested on Crotty Road and thinking, as we were being bussed to jail, that the floodlit hydroelectric facility looked like Tolkien's Mount Doom. I worried my mother when I wrote to her from Risdon Prison but my fellow blockaders and I spent much of our incarceration singing songs for the inmates.

Having grown up in Melbourne, Tasmania just grabbed me. I would stand amazed in the main street of Hobart looking out at the forested hills and nearby 1,200-metre peak, while groups that were far from 'green' but which had a great respect for nature were emerging. I stayed to work as co-director of the Tasmania Conservation Trust for three years, dealing with everything from a cat stuck up a tree that needed 'conserving' (according to its owner), through to the early days of the Tasmanian forest campaign.

Then in 1986 I joined the Parks & Wildlife



Service to develop the Minimal Impact Bushwalking campaign, which continues today under the Leave No Trace umbrella. At the time indiscriminate campfires were common, even against 800-year-old pencil pine trees, as was gastro on the Overland Track—unsurprising when we cataloged 100 'faecal events' within 30 metres of a hut. It was as if people had lost their connection with the wild. We took the campaign across Australia, focusing on core ideas like using fuel stoves, burying poo and not cutting vegetation for bedding—it was the last days of floorless Paddy Pallin tents. We drove round walking clubs and schools on the east coast pasting posters to toilet doors and even created a computer game with characters named things like 'destructor detergent'.

As part of the Walk Softly audiovisual campaign, I ended up on the cover of *Wild* issue 23. The shot was part of a series of photos of me disappearing into a bog up to my neck with only my hat left on top, then a snorkel comes out and I emerge on the other side. Everyone remembers the shot, but an unexpected side effect was that many people thought all Tasmanian bogs were horrendous, so they ignored the MIB advice of walk straight through. That particular bog is just off the now re-routed South Coast Track, and is still neck-deep.

The introduction of Fuel Stove Only Areas in 1989, together with track rangers, saw campfires decline markedly. It's a concern they're making a comeback in areas like the Walls of Jerusalem, which has the last two

major stands of pencil pine forest over grassland in the world. These stands were nearly burnt out last summer but we managed to halt the fire. The increasing amount of dry lightning strikes over the last decade, possibly due to climate change, is another threat to these ancient trees.

I moved to being world heritage area planner in 1992. The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is just magical; one of a kind. The light is different, as are the animals, the plants and the human history. Together with Mount Taishan in China, the TWWHA meets the most world heritage criteria of all the 981 sites on the list and covers almost a quarter of Tassie. The job involves lots of meetings as you work across three tiers of government plus Unesco's World Heritage Committee. Producing the 1999 TWWHA management plan was a career highlight because it took three years' of consultation with Commonwealth officials, traditional owners and developers, among others, often into the night. That plan is now under review and comes out for public comment in April.

I'm fascinated by the management of heritage areas outside Australia and other people's connection to the land. We deal with track erosion in a certain way, for example, by trying to halt erosion, but the managers of the Shirakami-Sanchi area in Japan have developed a different approach because they have to contend with landlides and earthquakes. The Japanese government also actively promotes forest bathing.

I don't really see the next phase as retirement. I'll miss the magnificent characters at the PWS but look forward to fitting in more walking, mountain biking, photography, meditation and travel. My walking partners at the Association of Rugged Mountain Men will tell you my favourite spots are anywhere in the south-west I haven't already been, and the diverse sidetrips off the Overland Track. Strangely, I'm yet to walk Frenchmans Cap and Federation Peak so perhaps they'll be the next adventure.



*Cradle Mountain*



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